



Taking Adalisa (Montgomery Syndicate #2)

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Category: Romance

Description: Adalisa never thought going to a local munch would change much for her. But one interaction with a mystery man would change her life forever.

He knows things about her she had never told anyone before, told her she was his, and wouldn't leave her alone.

Matthias is obsessed with Adalisa. He has been for months. But when she leaves her window open, he can't resist.

Will Adalisa be able to get away from Matthias, or will she succumb to his charm?

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ADALISA

“Are you sure you should be going to this?” Margery asks. “I just don’t know about this whole speed dating thing. What if one of them falls in love with you ’and then murders everybody you come in contact with because they’re jealous?”

I laugh and shake my head. “Nothing like that is going to happen. Everybody gives a fake name, and nobody knows your address. They don’t know your phone number.

You fill out a form as each person stops at your table, and then give it to the host. They go through the information and if both of you are interested in each other, they’ll email you and then you decide what you want to do next. Totally safe.”

It would be totally safe if I were actually going to the speed dating thing that was happening tonight, but I wasn’t. I’m actually going to a munch. A munch specifically for people who have a somnophilia kink.

To say I’m nervous is an understatement.

But I’m also really excited to see where this takes me.

I’ve read so many books with somnophilia in it, and it just calls to me.

It turns me on every single time, so I decided to finally take a step in the right direction and go to a munch with like-minded people.

I know I won’t be going home with anyone and actually doing it, but maybe I will

meet a couple of people who I vibe with.

Maybe then we can exchange phone numbers so we can get to know each other and potentially do something in the future.

But I can't deny that if I feel a connection with someone tonight, I'm going to suggest going back to my house.

"Still. It could be so dangerous. I just don't want anything bad to happen to you. What if somebody becomes obsessed with you? What are you going to do then?" Margery worries.

"Then I'll go to the authorities. You know I'm not afraid to go to them.

I'll make sure to keep all the evidence, if there is any, and give it to the police.

But that isn't going to happen. This event has been going on for years, and they always make sure the people who participate are safe," I explain, trying to ease Margary's concerns.

She's a sweet friend, but sometimes she can be over the top. I don't want to be single for the rest of my life.

"Maybe you should just try going on a dating website so I can follow you to the date and make sure that you're okay." Margarie stands behind me, doing my hair. "Or maybe I can say no to my plans today and make sure you're okay. Tell me the address?"

I shake my head and place my hand on top of hers.

"No. You aren't skipping your date for me'.

You're finally getting out into the dating world, and I'm not about to let you stop.

It's time; you need to do it. I'll be safe.

I promise." I look at her reflection in the mirror.

"I promise I will be extra careful tonight so you don't have to worry. "

"Maybe you should just wait." An uneasy look crosses Margery's face.

I sigh and shake my head once again. "I'm not going to wait.

I'm tired of reading about this. I want to experience it.

So I'm taking matters into my own hands and doing it.

I know you don't like it, but it's happening.

If you want, I'll text you when I get home.

We can't have our phones on while the speed dating is happening. "

It's a big fat lie, but Margery doesn't need to know it. I can have my phone at the munch, it is encouraged to have it in case you connect with someone. I don't want to be texting Margery every thirty minutes to ease her worries, though. I'm a grown woman.

"I'm also turning my location off on my phone so you can't follow me. Go have fun. You deserve to finally be happy." I turn around and look at Margery.

I didn't know Margery when the love of her life, Ethan, was in a horrific car crash

that killed him. Even years later, Margery still hasn't gotten over it, and it breaks my heart that she hasn't moved on.

"You can't do that!" Margery glares at me.

"I can. I already have done. Now you're going to be late for your date, so leave. Go have fun. I'll text you when I get home," I shoo Margery away.

She sighs and nods. "Okay, I know when I'm not wanted. If you don't text me before midnight, I will have a search party out for you. Don't think for a second I won't actually do it. You mean too much to me for me not to."

I crack a smile. "I wouldn't expect anything less."

Nerves run through my body as I stand outside the bar.

This is where the munch is taking place.

I haven't let myself think too much beforehand, but right now, I'm second-guessing myself.

It's a smaller bar, one that the organizer had rented out for the night.

I don't want to think about how much it costs.

A thrill shoots through me when I realize it'll only be people in there with the same kink as me?

Should I actually be here? Have I thought this through well enough?

Just as I am about to turn around to leave, a hand comes to rest on the small of my

back. My whole body stiffens as I look over at the person next to me.

Gasping, I'm instantly mesmerized. He's about a foot taller than me with a beard. His hair is jet black with silver strands peppering it.

Fuck.

He's hot.

My legs shake as I take in his beautiful green eyes that seem to captivate me like no other has.

"Are you going to stand out here all night, or are you going to go in?" he asks.

I lock my knees out, worried I'm going to become a pile of goo right in front of him on the sidewalk. His voice is smooth and deep, making my panties dampen and my pussy tingle.

He can talk to me any time he wants. Talk to me about anything and everything as long as I get to hear his voice.

"Wh-what?" I whisper, not hearing a word he said.

He turns toward me and gives me a dashing smile before gripping my chin between his thumb and pointer finger. "Are you going to stand out here all night, or are you going to go into the munch?"

"H-how did you know?" I whisper.

This isn't like me. I'm not the shy and insecure type, but I am in front of him. I want to drop to my knees and let him do anything he wants to me. I want him to take full

control, dominating me however he sees fit.

He raises an eyebrow, his hand still on the small of my back, almost possessively. “How do I know you were going into the munch?”

I nod, not trusting my voice right now.

“It’s rented out tonight for us. People who have the same common interests. ” His voice is gruff but smooth and calming.

“I don’t think—” I start, but a gently push to my back has me stepping forward.

“I’ve watched you look at it for the past five minutes. We’re going in.”

Before I can get any words out or fight away from his touch, we are already at the door. And before I know it, I’m inside. All eyes turn our way as the door shuts behind us.

“Welcome!” A heavy set man walks toward us. “My name is Benji, and I’m hosting tonight. We are just getting to know each other. Can the bartender get you anything to drink?”

Words are stuck in my throat as I stare at Benji. I didn’t think I was going to get this far, yet here I am. In the bar where the munch is happening with a random person who encouraged me.

Benji moves on his feet, looking uncomfortable as the seconds go by.

“We’ll both take a whiskey, neat, please,” the man beside me says. “Sorry about her, she’s a bit nervous.”

I turn my body toward him and glare. No one needs to know how nervous I am.

“Don’t worry! Everyone is the first time they walk into a munch. Sometimes they’re still nervous on the two-hundredth time. Don’t worry. Are you two together?”

“No,” I say.

“Yes,” my dark-haired companion says at the same time.

I don’t even know his name and he’s telling the host we are together. Who does he think he is?

“She’s mine.” He pulls me into to his body, and I glare at him, annoyed.

Benji looks between us, a smile blossoming on his face. “Your names?” he asks and then turns to the bartender and tells him our drinks.

“Matthias and Adalisa,” Matthias replies.

My whole body freezes as he says my name. How does he know my name? I didn’t introduce myself before. Have we met before and I just forgot? I shake my head. There is no way I would forget someone who looks and talks like him.

Tall. Dark. Handsome. Dangerous .

He has this air about him that sends sparks up and down my body. Nerves run through my body as I take him in. Excitement or weariness, I don’t know.

“My little Addy,” Matthias gently speaks, brushing his lips against mine. “We’ve been together for a couple of years, and she still tries to fight me on it. I think she likes me getting possessive, if you know what I mean.”

“Totally,” Benji replies.

My mouth hangs open as I stare at Matthias in utter shock. Is he for real right now?

“We felt like our sex life was getting a little boring. We both interested in this, so we decided why not try it and meet some others,” Matthias explains. “We wanted to spice things up a little. Bring some excitement back.”

A huge smile breaks out across Benji’s face as he looks between us two, not at all concerned by my shock. “Well, I’m glad you two came! Let me introduce you to everyone.”

Matthias grabs our drinks, handing me mine before placing his hand on the small of my back and pushing me forward a little. I glare at him. I need to get away from him and soon, but I can’t just leave right now without a reason. And if I do, he’ll come with me since he introduced us as a couple.

What is he thinking? How does he know my name?

Unease fills me the closer we get to the group. I push my concerns to the back of my mind as we get closer to the small group of people.

“This is Adalisa and Matthias, they have decided they want to join us to spice things up,” Benji explains as he sits beside a woman. “This is Morgan, Flynn, Rye, and Kirra.”

I wave but stay close to Matthias, not liking all of their eyes on me. I’ve never felt comfortable with so many people looking at me at once.

“You’re okay,” he whispers in my ear before turning to everyone. “So nice to meet all of you guys.”

We both sit beside next to each other.

“How did you two meet?” Morgan asks as she leans forward. “You look so good together. The perfect couple.”

Morgan and Kirra look exactly the same with short, brown hair in a pixie cut, side bangs, and hazel eyes.

“Yes, we’re twins,” Kirra responds. “We’ve got this whole thing on with another set of twins. It’s so hot and totally worth it. No jealousy between us.”

I blink several times, processing her words. They are twins dating twins.

“Enough about us. I want to know how you two met,” Morgan insists. “Come on, don’t be shy now.”

“We met at the bookstore Adalisa works at,” Matthias offers, and my whole body locks up again as I stare at him both in shock and a little bit of fear.

He knows more about me than I like. Have I met him before when I was really busy and didn’t realize? I would have remembered what he looked like since he is so hot. I would have stopped to admire him. So does that mean he’s been stalking me?

“I was walking by and saw her and knew she was the one for me. So I walked in and said I was looking for a book that I couldn’t remember the name of or who the author’s name.

I could only remember the basics,” Matthias explains.

“I wanted to spend as much time with her as I could, and it was the only way I knew she would give me a chance.”

My mouth falls open. I remember a guy his height and stature came in to look for a book. I remember that interaction, but I don't think it was Matthias. They look totally different.

"What happened next?" Kirra asks. "Don't leave us hanging."

"Girls, they obviously got together," Flynn says, rolling his eyes. "Let them breathe."

Matthias chuckles and takes a sip of his drink before looking down at me, his eyes twinkling.

The heat in his gaze makes me feel like I'm his world and everything revolves around me.

Tears pool in my eyes, and I don't know if it's because I'm scared or if he seems to be telling the truth about wanting to spend time with me.

"Shh, you're okay," he whispers. "Everything is going to be all right with me. I'll keep you safe."

But will he keep me safe from him ? "What a precious moment," Morgan whispers. "She is getting teary-eyed with him just talking about how they met."

"She helped me find the book, and obviously, I bought it. I came back a week later, trying to find a different book. This time I remembered the title, so it didn't look too weird.

After that, I asked her out," Matthias continues.

"She said no, but I wasn't going to give up.

I knew what I wanted, and it was her. She is my everything, and I love her. ”

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ADALISA

I suck in a breath as I look at him with, wide-eyed. Everything he said is completely true, but they with different men. All the same height, but they all looked different. That was all him?

Matthias looks at me with so much passion in his eyes, knocking the right out of my lungs. We stare into each other's eyes for several seconds, getting lost in each other. I should be running and screaming for him to leave me alone and stay away from me, but I don't.

"That is so sweet," Kirra finally speaks, her voice soft and high pitch. "You can tell how in love you guys are with each other. I hope to find that with someone one day."

"Aren't you with the twins?" I ask, turning away from Matthias.

His hand rests around my waist, pulling me half off my chair and into his body.

"Do you guys mind if Adalisa sits on my lap?" Matthias asks before Kirra can respond.

"Go ahead!" Rye's deep voice fills the bar. "If Monica were here, she would be sitting on my lap, but she had to work tonight and wanted me to meet some others."

Before I can say anything, Matthias lifts me and places me on his lap. My eyes are wide as I stare at Kirra, who is sitting across from Matthias. I try to push myself off his lap, but his arm wraps around my waist, keeping me in place.

“Be a good girl and stay where Daddy put you,” he growls in my ear.

I lock up as he calls himself Daddy. I never thought I would find it hot to hear a guy call himself Daddy, but hearing him utter those words makes me melt in his body, my pussy begging to be touched by him.

Margery has a Daddy kink, she told me when she was drunk and made me promise I wouldn't tell anyone else. I didn't think I would like it, those words turned me off, but hearing Matthias say it in his deep voice changes that for me.

I close my eyes and take a deep breath, trying to calm myself. This is not the time or place to get turned on. Especially as I don't know Matthias, and somehow he knows too much about me. I need to keep my head on a swivel and make it out of tonight alive like I promised Margery.

“Good girl,” he purrs, nipping at my ear.

Pleasure courses through my body, and I suck in a breath. Bad body for reacting to this, I scold myself. I need to get a grip on myself.

“You guys are just perfect for each other,” Kirra excitedly says. “You can see it written across both your faces. The love between you. Goals honestly. Super goals.”

If only they knew. Yes, I do feel a spark between us, the instant connection, but that could just be my pussy talking.

That girl has not been satisfied by a hunk of a man Matthias is in a long time.

She is begging me to take him home and let him have his way with us.

I grip his pants at the thought. I need to keep my mind off him and what I want him to

do to me.

It cannot go there, not unless I want to lose myself and never feel the same again.

Because I know once I have sex with Matthias, no one else is going to compare to him.

Nothing.

“What’s my baby thinking?” he growls. “Are you thinking about all the things I’m going to do to you when we leave?”

I shake my head, not trusting my voice.

“I don’t like lies, Little Bit,” He tightens his arm around me.

“Don’t they just look so perfect together?” Kirra asks.

“You can stop talking about them like they aren’t here,” Morgan chuckles. “Though, I don’t think they’ve heard a word we’ve said. They look like they’re in their own world.”

“Sorry guys,” I apologize, shrugging. “Matthias didn’t want to come tonight, but I made him. While he is on board with this, he doesn’t want a lot of people to know. He gets very shy.”

“You’ll pay for that.” His teeth graze my ear again.

I squirm in his lap, knowing full well I will pay for it. But maybe there is a way I can get out of it. As long as he doesn’t come home with me, I’m okay.

“How did you learn about somnophilia?” Rye asks. “My wife discovered it in a book a couple of years ago. Kept reading about it. About a year ago, she finally told me about it. We’ve hang out at different munches in the area to be around like-minded people.”

“Yeah, Adalisa, how did you learn about it?” Matthias asks, putting me on the spot.

Everyone’s eyes turn to me, and I suck in a breath, hating every second of their attention. I thought I would stay in the background tonight, talk to a couple of people, but not be the main attraction.

I was so wrong.

“I found out about it in books, too. Whenever I have free time at the store, I read. Someone recommended a book, and I felt connected to it somehow,” I explain, leaving out that I’ve never actually done it before.

I know I may end up hating it if I ever experience it, but somehow I don’t think I will. It’s a deep longing I have but that could also be my pussy talking, begging me to find someone to take care of her.

“You will love my wife.” Rye smiles. “You’ll have to let me know where you work so I can tell her. Maybe she can visit you there and then spend all my money.”

“You love it when she spends your money.” Kirra rolls her eyes. “Don’t even pretend. You encourage her to.”

“Guilty, but I have to make it look like I care every once in a while,” Rye chuckles.

I stay silent, letting them take control of the conversation. Maybe Rye will forget he asked me at the end of the night, so I won’t have to let him know.

“I found out from one of the twins,” Morgan explains. “Never even heard of it before him; I’m glad I took the chance on it. Best thing ever. I have is a bracelet to show him if I’m okay with it that night or not. Which, honestly, is almost every single night.”

“It can be weird waking up in the middle of the night to sex noises. We’ve invested in soundproofing in every room since we discovered it,” Kirra grimaces. “I don’t mind the noises, but then realizing that it’s my sister kind of freaks me out. She would agree.”

I giggle at the thought. I don’t have any siblings, but if I did, I wouldn’t want to hear any of them at it.

“Doing it now so that when we have kids, they won’t hear us and come running into the room asking what’s going on,” Morgan says. “Thinking about the future as well. Not trying to scar our children.”

How thin are their walls? They have to be really thin if they are already complaining about it. I can’t imagine having kids right now. Life is just starting for me, and while I want kids in the future, they are forever. I don’t think I’m ready to have them yet.

“When we built our house, we soundproofed every room,” Benji says. “Best decision we ever made. It costs extra, but it helps a lot down the line. Then you don’t have to be quiet when you have anyone else in the house. As long as you keep the doors and windows shut.”

“Hopefully, we won’t be in too much of a hurry and forget to close do that,” Kirra chuckles.

Matthias pats my thigh, and I look back at him. “Yes?”

“Time to go,” he says, leaving no room for arguments.

Matthias helps me stand, and everyone looks at us. I lean back into him, not liking the attention on us once again. It's like Matthias is a magnet to having everyone's focus on him. Does he ever get tired of it?

"We are sadly going to have to go home. Tomorrow is a busy day for us, and while we're having fun, I need to get Little bit into bed." Matthias wraps his arm around me.

"Did you just hear what he called her? Little bit. Why can't Dale call me that?" Kirra whines. "It's so sweet and so disgusting at the same time."

I tense up at her words.

"She doesn't mean anything bad by it," Morgan quickly says. "She hates pet names, but she also loves them. Her ex-boyfriend used to call her a pet name, one she didn't like, and kind of ruined them for her."

"You don't have to tell everyone about that," Kirra huffs out.

"Then maybe you shouldn't say it's sweet and disgusting in the same sentence," Morgan shoots back. "Then maybe I won't have to explain why you are insulting them."

Kirra rolls her eyes, and Matthias pulls me into his side.

"Please, come again. We'll have another munch next month. We would love to see you." Benji stands and shakes Matthias' hand. "Hopefully you guys will be able to stay longer and mingle. Next time we'll have more of the regulars here, so you can meet other people."

"Thank you," I whisper as Matthias pulls me toward the door.

As soon as we get outside, I yank my hand from his and glare, not caring if anyone sees us through the window. They shouldn't be able to hear anything from inside.

"Who are you?" I ask, taking a step back from him.

"Matthias," he replies.

"How do you know who I am?" I fold my arms over my chest and stand with my shoulders square.

It's so hard to be mad at him when he is so sexy, looking at me like he wants to devour me. I can't think about that, not if I want answers.

Matthias doesn't answer my question but takes a step forward instead. My heart rate picks up as I retreat, not wanting him any closer than he already is. This is dangerous. I can't think clearly when he is so close to me.

"Adalisa LeAnn Johnson," he whispers, his face inches from mine.

My mouth falls open, my eyes going wide as I stare at him. "Wh-what?" I whisper. "How d-do you know my full name?"

He smiles. "I know a lot about you."

Palms sweating, I look around us to find a means of escape, but everything is on the other side of him. Unless I turn around and make a run for it, but I have a feeling he's going to catch me quickly.

"Don't even think about it," he takes another step toward me. "You run and I'll chase you."

“N-no.” I don’t believe him at all.

“Oh, Little bit. You run, and I’ll definitely chase you. I love a good chase,” he purrs.

“Turns me on and makes me rock hard. If you want to test it out, turn and run. I dare you.”

Everything in me wants to see if he’s telling the truth, but I stop myself.

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“You want to.” He leans in and kisses my forehead. “You want to turn and run for me, but something’s holding you back. People? I have somewhere private we can play cat and mouse if you want.”

I open and close my mouth several times, too stunned to actually speak. I never thought I would find someone who would speak to my soul, but Matthias is doing that very thing. Where was he a while ago when I was giving up on anything like this?

Shaking my head, I take a step back. I can’t be thinking about how perfect he is for me. I can’t when he literally knows so much about me. Technically, I’ve never met him before. Do I have a stalker?

“I can see those wheels turning in your head. Give in. Run,” he eggs me on. “Come on. Run for me, let those wings fly.”

I tilt my body to the right, getting ready to dash away from him.

“Fly away, but don’t get used to it. Once I catch you, I’ll clip those pretty wings so you stay near me.” His finger trails down my left arm, making me still.

“N-no,” I stutter out, cursing in my head for showing weakness.

Matthias isn’t the type to show weakness to. Not when he could use it for anything, and I wouldn’t have a clue until it is too late.

“Not going to run for me?” Matthias asks. “Too bad. I was looking forward to a good

chase and then fucking you later. Making you sleep in my bed. I would wake you up with my mouth on you. Or maybe I would just slip right in because you're always going to be wet for me, aren't you?"

I don't say anything.

"You're wet for me right now, aren't you?" He cocks his head to the side.

I let out a shaky breath, keeping silent, and a smirk tugs on his face.

"Oh, Little bit," he murmurs. "You think keeping quiet will keep you safe? You're wrong. So wrong, but that's okay. I'll just have to show you."

Before I even realize he's moved, Matthias has me turned around, his arms wrapped around my waist as he holds me flush against him.

"You feel so good against me," he moans. "Just think about me inside of you. Feeling you clench around me as I pound into your tight pussy."

My thighs clench together as arousal floods me. Everything in me wants to beg him to do just that. But I shouldn't, not when he's throwing up red flags like he's bidding on something he desperately wants.

No.

Matthias is dangerous. I don't need that, and I especially don't need to bring it into my life and the people around me.

I can't let that happen.

"I think you like that." He runs his teeth along my neck. "I think you like the thought

of me pounding into you, showing you who's boss and how much pleasure I can bring to you."

I shake my head slightly.

"Lies. Do you know what naughty girls get?" he asks.

I shake my head again, not trusting my mouth to betray me.

"Naughty girls get a trip over Daddy's lap," he murmurs. "They get a spanking, but then all is forgiven."

My legs start to shake, threatening to buckle underneath me. I shouldn't be attracted to him and the things he is saying, but everything in me is pushing me toward Matthias.

"I think you'll like that, too, but we won't know until we try it. Do you want to try it tonight?" he asks, his arm tightening around my body.

"N-no," I stutter as I push against his thick arms. "I need to go home."

"Hmm, Daddy didn't say you could go home yet. Do you want to give our new friends a show? Show them how deeply in love we are?"

It's like cold water splashes over me. "I don't love you."

"But you will," he whispers in my ear. "You'll love me soon enough."

"No, I won't. I don't want anything to do with you. I don't want to be near you right now. I need to go home." I push at his hold again, trying to break free, but he doesn't budge. "Are your arms made out of steel?"

He chuckles but keeps hold of me.

“Let me go or I’m going to scream for help. Someone will hear,” I force out as I claw at his arms.

“No one is going to stop me,” he grits out in frustration.

I look around and realize he’s right. No one is out here to help us, and the people inside the bar aren’t paying us any attention. They are in their own world and think we are in love.

“I’ll get away from you and call the police,” I threaten.

I need to get out of his arms and far enough away to have time to call the police. That’s the only problem I’m facing right now.

“The police won’t do anything for you,” he growls. “They’ll see me and turn the other way like they didn’t see a thing.”

Dread fills my stomach, and I push at his arms even harder.

“But I’m feeling generous tonight,” he drawls. “Tonight... tonight I’ll let you go home without me, but sooner rather than later, you’ll realize you are mine, you will always be mine. You and I were made for each other, and there will never be a time when you don’t think about me.”

I scoff and turn when he lets me go. “Don’t flatter yourself. I won’t ever think of you again.”

He smirks and folds his arms over his chest. I lick my lips at the sight of his muscles. The things he could do to me with his arms are infinite. I never thought I would be a

forearm girl, but looking at Matthias' makes me weak at the knees.

"You'll think of me every minute." Matthias gives me a knowing look. "You'll think of me so much that you'll wear the bracelet to show me you want me to fuck you while you sleep."

I chuckle. "I don't own any bracelets to wear."

"You've been wearing one all night." He points at my arm and raises an eyebrow.

Looking down, my mouth hangs open when I realize there is a bracelet on my wrist, a simple silver, chain-linked band.

"Wear that when you go to bed and you'll find yourself waking up with me inside you, giving you the best pleasure you've ever had," he purrs.

"No way. This is coming off when I get home, and I'll be putting it in the trash. I won't ever think of you again. Get that through your thick skull already." I roll my eyes, turn around, and start to walk off.

A heavy swat lands on my bottom, and I yelp, spinning around and glaring at Matthias.

"You did not just spank me," I accuse him.

"Don't you ever roll your eyes at me again," he growls.

Without replying, I turn and leave, not giving him the time of day. "If I want to roll my eyes at you, I can and will. You can't do anything about it."

"We'll see about that, Little bit," he calls out as I get further away from him.

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ADALISA

Like I told Matthias, I took the bracelet off as soon as I got home, but I couldn't find it in me to throw it away. It was a really pretty, silver bracelet. Something I would pick out for myself if I saw it in a jeweler's window.

How does he know that's what I liked?

After rolling my neck to get rid of the tension in it, I scoff and sit in a chair. I wouldn't be surprised if Matthias has been following me for months and months, finding everything about me that he could.

Freaky.

Terrifying.

I should be scared and going to the police, but I can't bring myself to. There is just something about him that makes me want to get to know him more. There is a pull between us.

I haven't seen Matthias since the munch, three days ago. Part of me is disappointed I haven't seen him again, but the other part of me is grateful. I've tried so hard to get him out of my head. Though, like he said, I think about him constantly.

Infuriating.

Annoying.

How did he know I would think about him all the time? Was it a lucky guess, or did he put something in my drink that night that makes me think about him so much? He couldn't possibly have done that. There is nothing you can put in someone's drink to do that.

But somehow the thought of him is firmly stuck in my brain.

I think about him constantly. Every single time I do, I get frustrated with myself. How do I get him out of my head? Every single thing reminds me of him, especially at work, where I met him several times without knowing it.

"Still thinking about the speed dating?" Margery asks.

I look over at Margery and nod. "Sadly."

"It went that badly?" She sits down next to me at the counter.

It went that badly but at the same time, it went amazingly. I felt comfortable around Matthias until he told me everything he knew about me to the people at the munch.

"Adalisa?" Margery asks. "Are you all right? Did something happen that we need to notify the police about?"

"No, we don't need to call the police," I gently reply. They won't be able to do anything.

I don't know who Matthias is, but he has a bad boy aura about him. Him telling me the police will pretend like they saw nothing is running around my head. Who could he be that is so terrible that the police don't want to get involved?

Unless he is paying them to stay out of his business. They would if he paid them

enough.

“It went how I thought it was going to go. It was okay during times, and other times I was horrified,” I reply honestly. “Some things shocked me. I know they shouldn’t, but they did.”

Now I’m lying. But I don’t need Margery to worry about me, not when she is starting finally forget about Ethan. She should have done that a long time ago, but she really loved him.

“If any of them follow you or harass you in any way, let me know. We can go to the police. I’ve gotten to know one of them really well since Ethan died. He was there for me when I needed someone,” she whispers.

“I think he just wants to get with you,” I point out and instantly regret it. “Shit. Sorry, I shouldn’t have said that. It was uncalled for and rude of me.”

Margery chuckles and shakes her head. “You think I didn’t know that already?

He was making some pretty obvious advances toward me.

I’ve told him no several times, and he stopped.

He was there for me in the end. I haven’t talked to him in years, but I know he still works there. He will listen to you.”

I raise my hand. “I don’t need to talk to him. Nothing is going on. Everything is fine, I promise.”

Another lie.

I hate lying to her, but I don't need her to worry about me. Not when she is finally coming out of her shell. I don't need her to retreat when she finds out someone has been to our workplace and has been following me.

That will freak her out.

"If it changes, you tell me right away." Margery points a finger at me. "I don't want anything to happen to you. Not when you are the only person I like in this city."

"I thought you liked Ethan's sister, Bonnie?" I ask.

"I haven't talked to her in eighteen years.

We were friends, and I loved her, but she's probably forgotten about me by now.

"Margery looks down at her hands. "I want to talk to her again, but I don't want her to remember Ethan and it make her sad.

I don't know if she would, but I also don't want to trigger her if she isn't ready. "

"It's been eighteen years," I repeat.

Her shoulders slump. "Eighteen years, and yet it feels like yesterday. I don't know how she's feeling, but she was a lot closer to him than I was, and I was really close to him.

If I can't look at myself in the mirror without thinking about Ethan, I don't want to think about what Bonnie is going through. "

I sigh. "Shit. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said it like that. Eighteen years is a long time, but you lost someone you thought you were going to spend the rest of your life

with. I shouldn't have said that."

She gives me a small smile. "It's okay. I know what you meant. I'm not mad. It's just hard sometimes."

Now I feel like a jerk for saying that. I've never lost anyone like Margery has, yet I've just insulted her for taking so long to get over him.

"No, it's not okay. I shouldn't have done that. It was insensitive of me." I hold my hand in the air. "I really shouldn't have said that. I'm sorry."

"It's okay, Adalisa. I promise it's okay."

I know you didn't mean it badly. It has been eighteen years, and while some people might be over it and only grieve the person for a short time, I'm not there yet.

I think about him constantly. The love we had for each other was like nothing I've ever encountered before, and I'm sad I may never be able to feel that again.

"She gives me a small smile. "But I have to have faith that I might, or my life is going to be pretty depressing."

I grab Margery's hand, giving it a gentle squeeze. "You will find love again, I promise. There is someone out there for you. Someone you will love as much as you loved Ethan. Will they replace him? No, but they will stand right next to him in your heart."

Margery wipes away tears from her eyes. "I hope so."

The bell rings, signaling we have a customer.

“Welcome! If you need anything, let us know. We’ll gladly help you.” Margery raises her voice.

“Is there an Adalisa who works here?” a man calls out.

My whole body freezes as I look up. Is Matthias here? He can’t possibly be; that isn’t his voice. Whenever I think back to helping those guys, I remember their voices were the same.

“She’s right here,” Margery says for me. “What can we help you with?”

“I have a package for her.” The delivery man walks over to us and holds out a small package.

I take him in, trying to find similarities with Matthias, but he doesn’t look anything like him. He’s much shorter than Matthias.

“Thank you,” I gently reply, grabbing the package.

I look down at the box in my hand, not wanting to open it here. I know it’s from Matthias.

“Who’s it from?” Margery asks once the courier leaves.

“An old friend,” I lie. “I wasn’t expecting this for another week. I thought it was coming to my house, not work.”

“Is it something bad?”

I shake my head. “No, it’s not.” Another lie.

“Well, open it then,” Margery urges me. “Open it and show me what it is.”

I hold it against my chest. “I don’t think I want to right now. It’s really private if I remember correctly. He wouldn’t want me to show it to anyone else.”

“What is so private? Is it his semen? Or maybe some dick pictures?” Margery chuckles. “It can’t be that private.”

I have no idea what it is, and that worries me. What is Matthias sending me now?

“Come on, I promise if I ever meet this friend that I won’t tell anyone. You can trust me.” She winks.

“I do trust you, but I don’t want to betray his confidence.” I look at her.

“Did he tell you that you couldn’t show anyone?” Margery asks.

“No, he didn’t,” I sigh.

“So, open it. You may want me near you in case you get emotional,” Margery suggests.

Taking a deep breath, I rip open the package and nearly drop the contents if it weren’t for Margery holding my hands up.

“A bracelet?” Margery questions. “There is nothing special or embarrassing about that. Unless there is some hidden meaning behind it.”

It isn’t just any bracelet. It’s the bracelet I took off the night of the munch and left on my nightstand next to my bed.

“Oh! There’s a note!” Margery squeals, picking up the piece of paper before I can.

“No!” I raise my voice, but it is too late.

“Oh,” she whispers as she reads it.

Worry churns in my stomach as I stare at her. What could he have possibly written in there for her to just say, “Oh?”

Is it something bad? Naughty? Stalkery?

“Give it to me,” I demand, holding my hand out.

Margery hands me the note, and I quickly read it.

Matthias

You left this on your nightstand. I want you to wear it when you go out. Protection. Wear it at night if you want me to know.

“An old friend who you left your bracelet at his house?” Margery asks. “Is there something more with him? What aren’t you telling me?”

I open and close my mouth several times as I stare at the note. What am I supposed to say?

“Adalisa?” Margery gently touches my arm. “Are you okay? Do you need to go home? You know I can look after the shop if you need to leave. I’ve been here several times on my own. No one has to know you went home early.”

I shake my head. “No, I don’t need to go home. I’m just a little shocked.”

“How?”

“I didn’t think I left it at his house,” I whisper. “I thought I had misplaced it at mine.”

All a lie, another one I will need to stay on top of. How am I going to tell her the truth? I can’t ever, not unless I want her to look at me like I’m crazy and completely out of my mind for not going to the police when I first met Matthias.

“I swore I left it on my nightstand, but I couldn’t find it,” I mumble, lying even more.

“What does he mean it will protect you? Do you have some kind of kinky stuff going on with him?” Margery asks.

I stare at her with wide eyes. Her question immediately pulls me out of my shock.

“No!” I shout. “We don’t and we never will. We are just friends. I don’t want any more with him.”

We aren’t even friends, but he knows me better than my best friend.

“Why don’t you want anything else with him?” Margery asks. “If he cares about you this much, you should go with it. It’s time you found someone who loves you for you.”

If only she knew the truth, she wouldn’t be saying those things. But she doesn’t; she can’t.

“It’s complicated,” I mumble. “Everything is complicated with him.”

“You can talk to me about it if you want. I’m a good listener.” Margery places her hand on my shoulder.

“I don’t really want to talk about it, but thank you. I appreciate it.” I smile at her.

I look down at the bracelet, running my fingers over it. It’s my style, and I want to wear it, but I don’t want to give Matthias the satisfaction of knowing I am. I don’t want him to think I have any interest in him.

I can’t.

“Well, put it on,” Margery urges me. “Did he buy the bracelet for you, or did you just leave it at his house?”

“He bought it for me.” I can’t help but tell her the truth.

“He knows you well. Simple and elegant. Wear it so you don’t lose it. Then, when you get home, you can put it away safely if you don’t want to wear it anymore,” Margery suggests. “But if you don’t want to, we can put it in the safe until you leave.”

I bite my lip, looking down at the bracelet once more. “No, I’ll wear it until I get home.”

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 1:40 pm

ADALISA

Sitting on my bed, I stare at the bracelet on my wrist. Should I take it off or leave it on? There's no way he's going to come by my house to see whether I'm wearing it or not before I go to bed.

I groan in frustration as I grab it. I shouldn't want this. I shouldn't want any of this, but here I am, contemplating it.

"No," I mumble, ripping the bracelet off and placing it on my nightstand.

Standing up, I walk out of my room and toward the kitchen. There is no reason for me to even consider wearing it to bed.

But it's your fantasy, my brain whispers.

I grip the kitchen counter as I take a deep breath. It is my fantasy, but I shouldn't want it with Matthias. I don't know him.

But you don't need to know him right now. That can come later. You feel safe around him, my brain continues.

"Stop," I mumble. "Just stop. I know I feel comfortable around him, but he knows so much about me. Things I haven't told anyone. He knows too much and I know nothing about him."

After getting a glass from the cabinet, I fill it with tap water and guzzle it down.

Hopefully, this will calm me enough that I'll be able to go to bed.

I have to work tomorrow, and I don't need to think about Matthias anymore.

When I finish the water, I head back to my room, taking my clothes off, and sit on the edge of my bed, my eyes landing on the bracelet.

Without thinking, I pick up the bracelet and put it on. Maybe someone else will know what this bracelet means and come give me pleasure in the middle of the night. I scoff at that thought. The only person who knows what this bracelet means is Matthias.

"Nothing is going to happen," I tell myself as I crawl under the blankets and fall asleep.

"Shhh," someone whispers. "Everything is okay. Daddy is going to take good care of you."

I sigh as my right leg is moved, draping over someone or something.

"Such a good girl for me. Wearing that bracelet like I told you to," he mumbles. "My good girl."

Fingers trail to my breasts, gently massaging them. I moan, my head tilting back and hitting something warm.

"I've got you," the man whispers again. "Just relax for me."

Whimpering, I try to move my hand to hold his and bring it back to my breasts, but he quiets me. I want pleasure, and he was making me feel so good.

His hands trail down my stomach and straight toward my mound.

“Did you shave for Daddy?” he asks.

I nod, my eyes still closed as I let my dream play out.

“Such a good girl for Daddy,” he purrs as his fingers dip into my passage. “Always such a good girl.”

My thighs try to close as pleasure courses through me, but with how he positioned my right leg, I can’t. His fingers continue to slowly thrust in and out of me, building up my orgasm again.

“Please,” I beg, trying to move my hips so he goes deeper. “Please.”

His fingers leave me, and I whine. “You don’t get to move.”

I keep my hips still, needing him to give me all the pleasure he wants.

“Such a good girl. Stay still while Daddy slides into you.” His words come out as he takes my ear between his teeth. “You’re so wet for me, just perfect.”

He moves a little behind me, and he slowly starts to slide into me. My mouth falls open, a moan escaping as I stretch around him.

“Pl-please,” I clench around him as he settles inside of me. “Move.”

He hums. “I think I might stay like this for a little while,” he murmurs. “Let you feel me inside of you, but not give you any pleasure. Show you who is in charge, who will always be in charge.”

“No, please. I promise,” I whisper.

He slowly pulls out before pushing back into me at a painstakingly slow pace. My eyes flutter open as the tingles race through me. The darkness of my room is the first thing I see. I blink several times as he continues to thrust into me.

“Ma-Matthias?” I whisper.

“Shh, it’s me, Little bit,” he moans into my ear. “You wore the bracelet for me. Such a good girl.”

I move my leg, giving him better access to me as he continues to push in and out of me. Clenching around him, my head falls back as the tension builds in my core.

“Please,” I mewl.

Without warning, he flips me onto my front, raises my hips, and starts thrusting into me with force.

“Matthias,” I cry out, pushing my hips back.

He picks up his pace as his hand wraps around my waist, his fingers finding my clit as he continues to pound into me. My head drops to the bed as I fist the sheets, his fingers pressing my clit, moving in a circular motion.

“Come whenever you want,” Matthias groans.

My hand moves to my breast, cupping it as he continues to assault my clit with his fingers. Moaning, I clench around him as I push my hips back, wanting him to go in deeper.

“Come for me,” he commands as he pinches my clit, pushing me over the edge as he thrusts into me.

Screaming, I come apart around him. He follows suit with a yell of pleasure. I let the euphoria flow through me as he slowly thrust into me while the aftershocks hit me.

Matthias carefully pulls out of me, and I fall onto my side, taking a deep breath in as my body tries to come down from what he just did to me.

“Such a good girl,” he praises me, wrapping an arm around my body. “I’ll be right back.”

I mumble unintelligibly, my eyes closing as I feel him get off the bed. Where is he going? Why is he leaving so soon after he gave me the best orgasm I’ve ever had?

“Matthias?” I attempt to turn my body to see where he went, but sleep weighs my body down, keeping me in place. “Matthias?”

The sound of the faucet running fills my ears, and my eyebrows pull together. What could he be doing with water?

“I’m right here,” he whispers. “I just went to get a washcloth for you.”

I hum and let him take care of me. I can be embarrassed about it tomorrow when I’m fully awake. This is the first time I’ve had someone clean me up after sex, and it’s kind of nice not having to do it myself.

“I’ve got you,” he murmurs. “Just let Daddy take care of you.”

And that’s exactly what I let Matthias do: take care of me. He’s gentle as he rubs the warm washcloth over my core and thighs, making sure to get every crevice.

“Such a good girl for me,” he praises. “Do you need to pee?”

“No,” I whine, not wanting to get up from the comfort of my own bed.

“I think you should,” his hand is on my hip. “Come on. Let’s get you to the bathroom.”

I lay there, limp as he tries to pick me up. If he’s going to make me go, I’m going to make it difficult for him. He’s going to have to do all the work. I don’t want to, even though I know I should. I just want to lie in bed and fall back asleep after having sex with him for the first time.

My eyes go wide.

Shit .

I flail my arms like a madwoman as I get out of his arms, pushing myself to the edge of the bed where it connects with the wall, staring at Matthias.

“You are really here,” I whisper, not taking my eyes off him.

Shit .

I just had sex with him. I didn’t think he was actually going to see my bracelet and come in, but deep down, I knew it was a possibility.

“Yes, I am.” He smiles. “We just had sex.”

“You broke in,” I say in disbelief. “I locked my doors and windows.”

He sits at the edge of the bed, gazing at me like I’m his prey. I am. He has his eyes set

on me, and there is nowhere for me to go. I can't try to run to the door because I would have to get past him.

He's too fast for that.

"You did lock it, but you really need new locks and a security system to keep you safe," he tells me.

"It was far too easy to get into your house. No deadbolt on any of your doors. Do you know how dangerous that is? Anyone with a motive could get into your house and do anything to you. You sleep like the dead."

"Like you did?" I look at him like he's crazy.

He makes a tsking sound with his mouth. "No, not me. Why, do you think I've got bad intentions?"

I keep my mouth shut. I know he's got bad intentions. With the aura he gives off and then breaking into my house. Let's not forget him knowing things about me that I haven't told anyone and dressing up like other people to come into my workplace.

Those are not normal things for a person to do.

"Cat got your tongue?" he chuckles. "I'm not a good man. I'm the stuff of people's nightmares, but for you, you don't need to be afraid of me, little bit. Nothing bad is going to happen to you."

I want to believe him, but I'm having a hard time.

"Wh-what do you do?" I whisper, not knowing if I want to know the answer or not.
"H-how did you break into my house?"

“It was quite simple. Your window doesn’t lock, even if you think it does. The latch doesn’t seal. It was easy to pop it right open, but no one would know that unless they were through your window,” he says nonchalantly. “But no one is going to do that. That’s my pleasure and my pleasure alone.”

My mouth hangs open as I stare at him. “H-how long h-have you been watching me?”

He looks into the distance, but for some reason, I know he already knows the answer. He seems like the type of person who would keep those things in his head.

“Several months now,” he replies after some time. “I first saw you walking down the street to work when I was watching someone for a job. You captivated my attention, almost made me lose the person I was following. I knew right then and there you were the perfect person for me.”

I take a deep breath in, my body feeling shaky with all the information. How have I not realized he’s been watching me? How could I not feel his stare on me as I went about my life?

“I’m not yours,” I finally reply. “I will never be yours.”

He smiles, cocking his head to the side as he looks at me. “We’ll see about that.”

I shake my head, pushing myself into the wall even more, wanting to get as far away from him as I can. But I’m backed into a corner with no way out.

Just how he wants me.

“Let’s go get you to the bathroom.” He holds his hand out, but I don’t take it.

I look between his hand and his face. Is he going to let me go if I put my hand in his?

Will he kidnap me?

“Adalisa,” he growls. “Hand. Now.”

Before I can blink, my hand is in his grasps, and he helps me off the bed.

“I... Bad hand,” I look down at our joined hands.

I should not be this close to him at all.

“Good hand, and a good girl for following my order, even if it was delayed.” He leads me to the bathroom.

I glare at him as he stands in the bathroom with me. I look at him, waiting for him to leave so I can use the toilet.

“Go do what you need to.” He gestures toward the toilet.

“No way in hell am I going to go to the bathroom while you are in here. That is a line,” I cross my arms over my chest.

He takes a step forward, gripping my chin with his fingers. “There are no barriers between us. There is nothing between us,” he growls. “But this once, I will let you go to the toilet alone. Do not get used to it.”

I glare at him as he walks out, leaving the door wide open.

“Do not even think about it,” he says before I can move. “The door stays open. I’m not in there, but the door will not shut.”

I take a deep breath in and slowly let it out. I can’t do this. There is no way I can do

this with him standing in my bedroom with the bathroom door wide open.

“If you need help, just ask. I will be more than happy to help you,” he calls out.

“Fuck you!” I yell.

“That can be arranged. You just let me know when and where, and I will be there.”

I growl in frustration, stomping my foot as I turn to look at the toilet.

“I can do this,” I whisper. “I have to do this or else he’s going to come in here.”

“Are you talking to yourself?” he asks.

Clenching my hands, I take another steadying breath and ignore him. He does not deserve my attention, not now and not ever. If I ignore him long enough, not wear the bracelet again, then he will eventually realize I’m not the girl for him.

“Chop chop,” he calls out. “Any longer and I’m going to come in there and help you.”

I quickly sit on the toilet and start peeing as I think about anything else but him being in my room and hearing me do my business.

I groan, placing my face in my hands. We were standing in the bathroom naked as we talked.

We were sitting on my bed talking as I was flashing him. How could I be so dumb?

“Oh, Little bit,” he whispers. “Everything is going to be all right.”

I scream as his hand touches my shoulder, not expecting or hearing him come into the bathroom.

“No!” I yell. “You are not supposed to be in here. You are not supposed to be able to hear me pee. You aren’t supposed to look at me.”

Matthias pulls my hands away from my face and cups it with his own. “This body is mine. You are mine. You will not do anything about it, you can’t.”

I shake my head, pulling my face from his hands and quickly cleaning myself up before standing up. “No. You can’t do this.”

He pushes me up against the wall, caging me in with his arms. “I can, and I will. You are mine, and there is nothing you can do about it.”

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Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 1:40 pm

ADALISA

I suck in a deep breath as I stare at Matthias, not knowing what to say or do. I've tried telling him he can't be in here, but he's obviously not paying attention. I can't go to the police since he said they will act as if nothing is happening.

Who do I go to?

I can't tell Margery about it. She wouldn't understand that I can't go to the police. They are in so many people's pockets; I don't trust them.

No.

I can't and won't do it.

"Let's go have breakfast," he says. "I know a place just around the corner."

"No," I state. "I am not getting breakfast with you. I need to get ready for work, and you are not part of it. I don't want to see you again."

His face hardens as he looks at me and my mouth drops open on a gasp. Okay, not the right thing to say, but I need him to understand that he can't just walk all over me. That he can't just declare that I am his and expect me to roll over and be okay with it.

I'm not.

I never will be.

“You will come out to eat with me before you work,” he declares.

“No, I won’t. I will kick and scream the whole way and make a scene if you drag me there,” I fire back, not giving in.

He inhales deeply, keeping his eyes on me. We stare at each other for a while, not a word passing between us.

“I promise I’ll make a scene,” I tell him again, wanting him to really know I mean business.

He smiles.

He fucking smiles .

“Good. You making a scene won’t bother me,” he states, and my mouth falls open again.

“It... it won’t?” I ask.

“No, it won’t. Everyone knows who I am. It won’t do anything. They know not to interfere if I am with someone.” He smirks and cocks his head to the side. “Did you really think it would deter me? Oh, baby, you are so wrong.”

Tears prick my eyes, and I blink them away, not wanting to give him the satisfaction of seeing me break down in front of him.

“It’s okay,” he whispers. “Everything is going to be okay. You can come peacefully, or you can kick and scream like you said. Either way, you are coming to breakfast with me.”

I clench my jaw as I glare at him.

Pick your battles.

I need to be wise about this until I have a way to get out.

I need to come up with a plan. Maybe I can move somewhere he won't be able to find me and lay low for a little while until he forgets about me.

Margery won't understand, but maybe if I tell her I'm going on a vacation, one I really need, she'll understand.

"Okay," I whisper, forcing the next couple of words out of me. "I'll come with you."

Am I really doing this? Am I really about to go to breakfast with someone who claims I am theirs and won't hear anything else?

Yes, I am, and I can't do anything about it. I could try and make a scene like I said I would. But if he is telling the truth, then I'm just wasting energy that I could be saving for something else. I am going to need this energy at a later date, I can tell.

"Good. Let's get dressed," he says as he pushes away from the wall and walks out of the bathroom, leaving me alone.

I take several deep breaths, trying to calm myself as I think over the situation. I didn't think putting on the bracelet would make him possessive of me like this.

I didn't know going to that munch was going to change my life.

If I had known, I wouldn't have gone. I would have saved myself from having my life turned upside down. But would he have made us meet in another place?

He is in control of everything, and I can't do anything about it right now.

"Adalisa!" he calls out. "Come and get dressed. I picked out one of your dresses for you."

I push myself off the wall and stalk into the room, my eyes narrowing on the dress he picked.

It's one of my more innocent dresses, one I love but don't wear often.

It makes me feel girly and like I stand out in the world.

I don't like being the focus of a room when I wear it, so I normally wear it around the house.

"I found this at the very back of your closet and thought you would look nice in it." Matthias picks up the dress and holds it out. His eyes scan my body as he licks his lips. "I wouldn't mind you going out like this, but I figure you wouldn't want to."

I snatch the dress out of his hands and quickly put it on, not wanting him to be able to see my naked body any more than he needs to. Rushing past him, I open my drawer and grab some underwear.

"No panties," he says, grabbing them from my hands. "You are not permitted to wear panties with this dress."

"No, you can't do that. It's New York City. It's windy outside. One step outside and everyone will see my pussy! I am not walking down the street and showing everyone my bits." I grab another pair, but he takes them before I can put them on.

"I said no panties, so you will not wear any." He closes the drawer.

“You cannot expect me to walk down the street with no panties on.” I look at him in disbelief. “I’m not having everyone see my pussy.”

“You won’t be walking down the street. You’ll be walking to my car and then into the shop. While we are walking out to my car and to the shop, you can hold onto the side of your dress so it does not fly up,” he points out. “Problem solved.”

“Problem solved?” I ask. “No. Problem not solved. I am not leaving this house without any panties. Going without a bra is one thing since this has a built-in one, but without panties is a no-go. I’m completely exposed.”

He takes my panties and drops them onto the floor and steps closer to me. “You will not be completely exposed to everyone. No one will dare look at you while I am with you. One wrong look and they will have me to deal with. Trust me, they don’t want to deal with me.”

I shake my head and take another step back. “This is all too much. I can’t do this.”

“You can and you will.” He shrugs. “I can carry you over my shoulder, giving everyone a little peek of my pretty pussy or you can walk by yourself.”

I take a deep breath and stare at him, hoping he gives me another option—any option. But as the seconds go by, I realize he isn’t going to give me one. “Tick tock. Pick or I will pick for you,” he says. “And you won’t like my choice.”

“I’ll walk,” I quickly say. “I’ll walk to the car and into the restaurant.”

There is no way I’m going to let everyone see my pussy as he walks out of my house with me over his shoulder. No way in hell.

“I was hoping you would pick the other option,” he gently offers. “Maybe next time.

Maybe we can do it when it grows dark the first time, so you aren't as embarrassed. There is nothing to be embarrassed about. Everyone will know you belong to me. They already do."

"They do?" My eyebrows furrow. "But how?"

He chuckles. "Quite simple. You look amazing when you sleep. One picture told them you were off limits. It spreads like wildfire when you have connections and people are afraid of you."

"You're lying." I shake my head.

I try to get away from him, my back hitting the wall. He has to be lying. He wouldn't use my picture to show people that I'm off limits.

"Oh, but you underestimate me," he says, his voice smooth. "I would do it again if I had to."

We stare at each other for several seconds, letting the quiet settle around us.

He keeps shocking me, and I don't know how to cope with it.

"Now, let's go get breakfast before you have to work.

" He holds his hand out for me. "I would hate for you to be late for work. But we aren't going to let that happen. "

"It wouldn't matter," I mutter to myself.

My boss doesn't seem to care if we are late. She doesn't seem to care about a lot of things. She just wants the store open every day so we make money and then we can

close whenever we want to. I know the longer we stay open, the more money we'll earn.

Matthias cups my face. "It wouldn't?"

I look away and step toward the door. "No, it wouldn't, but I still need to get there on time. We have customers who like to come in at a certain time, and I can't disappoint them."

I should have known he would hear me when I was talking to myself. He hears everything. I don't need him thinking I don't have to go into work on time. It's an excuse to cut things short.

Matthias grabs my hand and guides me out of my own apartment and onto the street.

"I do know how to get out of my building. I've been doing it for several years now," I tell him, feeling slightly annoyed already. "You don't have to hold my hand."

His grip tightens a fraction. "Holding your hand ensures me that you aren't going to run off. Though I do love a good chase, so maybe I should let your hand go so you can run."

I glare at him. "I will not be running for you to fulfil some twisted fantasy with me. I'm not into that."

But the thought of being chased turns on something inside of me. The thrill running through my body as I know he's going to catch me, but I would still try and get away.

He wraps an arm around my waist, pulling me in close as we stand in front of his sleek black sports car. "Lies," he whispers in my ear. "I saw the way your body tightened just a bit as you thought about it. You can't lie to me."

I push my body away from his, opening my door and sliding into his car. I'm not going to give him the satisfaction of him hearing me say he was right. Nope. No way in hell.

Matthias closes my door and walks around the car, keeping his eyes on me the whole time. My eyes flutter over to the door handle. Would I have enough time to get out and safely run somewhere before he can catch up?

"I wouldn't try that if I were you," he says.

"Try what?" I sass back, putting my seatbelt on.

"Getting out of the car. The child lock is on, so you won't be able to get out." He looks smug as he starts the car.

I clench my jaw and look away. Of course, he put the child lock on. It's like he knew what I was going to think. Almost like he could read my mind and intentions. Maybe he's done this with another girl.

"Wait!" I yell, my hand gripping the door handle. "Stop!"

My breathing comes out in pants as he stops the car and turns toward me. Shit. What if he has done this before? What if he is some type of serial killer who follows his victims for months to learn their habit?

"What's wrong, Adalisa?" he asks.

I push my body into the door, staring at him in horror. "Are you a serial killer? Have you done this before?"

I don't expect him to answer me truthfully, but maybe I can read his body language if

he is lying to me or not.

Maybe he'll mess up if I ask him too many questions and annoy him.

Matthias full-on laughs as he stares at me.

I wasn't expecting that reaction. I was expecting him to brush it off and have some elaborate explanation as to why he's been following me.

"I'm not a serial killer, and I've never done this before," Matthias finally says, sobering up after several minutes of laughing. "But I have killed people, and animals when I go hunting. But I don't think you included animals in your question."

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Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 1:40 pm

ADALISA

“Y ou... what... I... huh?” I look at him, confused.

He isn't a serial killer, but he has killed people. But wouldn't that make him a serial killer then?

“I am not a serial killer. To be categorized as a serial killer, you need to commit several murders and have a pattern of sorts with the victims. I kill people, but I have very good reasons for doing it. I do not kill innocent people,” he explains.

“And while I get a thrill from it, I don't just go out and kill anyone.

There are legit reasons for my killings. ”

I stare at him, not knowing what to do or say. What am I to say? He's just confessed to killing people in front of me.

I should go to the police. I should tell someone that I've found a murderer, but I have no proof. He hasn't given me any details.

“So, don't group me with serial killers. It would be bad for my reputation.” He actually smirks at that statement.

“Reputation?” My eyebrows furrow. “What reputation?”

He leans in, and I wait for him to tell me the secret about him.

“You’ll soon see,” he whispers before pulling back and getting out of the car.

I relax in my seat, taking a deep breath as he walks around the car. I need to get away from him. I need to come up with a plan to leave so he can’t find me.

Matthias opens the door, holding his hand for me.

I take his hand with one of mine and hold my dress down with the other as we walk into the small restaurant that is a essentially hole in the wall.

How have I never heard of this place? I’ve lived in New York City my whole life, yet this little place has escaped me.

“Sit,” he says as we walk up to a table in the corner.

I slide into the booth, getting close to the wall as he sits beside me. I should have sat on the other side, but he pointed to this one, and my brain, without even thinking, did what he said.

“Oh, Matthias! You’ve finally come in,” An older lady stands at the end of the booth, a bright smile across her face. “And who is this lovely lady?”

“Ma, this is Adalisa, my girl,” Matthias replies. “Adalisa, this is my ma.”

I blink several times as I take in the older woman. Does she know what her son does? Does she know what he is doing to me right now?

“Adalisa,” he growls low.

“Sorry,” I whisper. “Nice to meet you, Ma’am.”

I give her a confused look as she smiles at Matthias before looking at me. She is looking at him like he is her most prized possession.

She must not know what he does, then. She's looking at him like he's done nothing wrong in this world.

"It's so nice to finally meet ya." Her smile grows even more as she holds out her hand.

Matthias doesn't look at me, but his leg bumps into mine. I plaster a fake smile on and shake her hand. What would Matthias do to me if I didn't shake his mother's hand?

"How long have you known my boy for?" a

she asks, sitting across from us.

"A couple of days," I reply.

"Several months," Matthias says at the same time.

I suck in a breath and glare at him. She was looking at me when she asked the questions, and I assumed I was supposed to answer truthfully.

And I did.

I've only known Matthias for a couple of days. Before that, he was different people and someone I didn't know.

"Matthias!" his mother scolds. "Do not tell me this is the same young woman you were seeing several months ago."

“I was seeing her. Almost every single day,” he replies like nothing is wrong. “I saw her from afar as she worked or when she got home.”

His mother stares at him like he’s grown two heads. Maybe this is my chance.

“He’s apparently been stalking me for several months, dressing up as different people to come into my work and talk to me.

He knows things about me that I haven’t told anyone,” I rush out, looking at her with pleading eyes.

“I didn’t know him until a couple of days ago when he showed up at an event I was going to and pretended I was his girlfriend. ”

She should be able to help me get away from her son. Maybe she knows someone who can apprehend him while I escape.

“He did what?” his mother gasps. “Matthias, you did not!”

I look at Matthias, a smug smile dancing across my face. But he doesn’t look at me.

“I did, and I don’t regret anything. She is mine and will always be mine,” Matthias tells his mother. “Just like dad knew you were his.”

Wait .

I look at his mom to see her smiling at him.

“You are worse than your father,” she chuckles.

“Wait,” I whisper, looking between them.

Matthias looks at me, a smirk across his face. “Did you think Ma would agree and help you?”

I nod and look back at her. Something dances in her eyes, and that’s when I realize I’m on my own.

“My dad did the same thing to Ma when they first met,” Matthias explains. “Though she embraced it and lived with him. Gave him hell every chance she could, but Ma fell in love with him right away.”

“No,” I say in disbelief.

“It’s true. But your father kidnapped me when he first saw me.

What he didn’t know is that I knew who he was and I had a massive crush on him.

When we first met, I pretended I didn’t know him, which infuriated him.

I knew he was going to be at the event, and I made sure I looked the best so I would capture his attention but also that it didn’t look like I was trying too hard.

I didn’t want to scare him off,” she says, looking off into the distance as if she remembers that night.

“But once he got home and claimed that I was his, I turned the freak on and told him things he didn’t want anyone to know.

The look of shock on his face was priceless. ”

My mouth hangs open as I look at her. She was okay with being kidnapped? She wanted him to kidnap her so she could be with him?

“What is wrong with all of you?” I ask, looking at them in horror.

“A word of advice?” His mom looks at me.

“These men aren’t like other men. When they see what they want, they take it, no matter what.

I wouldn’t try to fight them to allow you to go, especially Matthias.

He is a possessive bastard and won’t let you go now that he has you.

But you can give him hell for it. Make him work for everything. ”

“No,” I say, shaking my head. “No, you don’t just give up.”

“You aren’t giving up. What will your life be like when you are with him? Will you be happy?” she asks.

“No!” I raise my voice, not caring who hears me and definitely not caring that I’m making a scene.

Everyone here probably knows what he has done and his father has done and won’t say anything. They are all accomplices.

“No, you won’t be happier? No, you aren’t giving up? Or no you won’t be happy?” his mother cocks her head to the side. “That’s three different answers.”

“No to all of it. I am giving up if I just let him take me without fighting back. No to me being happy with him, and no to my life being better with him!” I shout.

I groan in frustration as I try to stand, realizing I’m blocked in by Matthias. He did

this on purpose. He wanted me to sit here so when I met his mom and found out how she met his father, I wouldn't be able to get out.

"You are cruel," I growl at him. "So fucking cruel. I hate you."

"You don't hate me," he replies. "You are just uncertain about everything. Don't worry, everything is going to make sense soon enough. Before you know it, you'll realize you love this life. I'm going to take good care of you. You will want for nothing."

"There will be some danger involved. What they do isn't safe, but they will keep you safe," his mother chimes in.

"They?" My eyes go wide.

No fucking way there are two of them. I cannot handle that.

"It's just Matthias for you. I was generalizing. My husband is in the same business as Matthias," she explains.

"No, I can't do this." I shake my head. "I'm not going to do this. Move."

I push Matthias' shoulder, but he doesn't budge.

"You need to let me go now. I need to get out. I need to get away from you," I demand loudly. "Let me out!"

"Matthias, let her out. She'll come around," his mother says.

"No," is all Matthias replies.

“I will crawl under the table,” I threaten.

“You will not crawl on the floor unless I demand it.” His face is inches from mine. “You are mine, and no matter what happens, you will always be mine. Do you understand?”

“No,” I grit out through clenched teeth. “No, I do not understand, and no I will not accept it.”

Silence fills the air around us as we stare at each other. Both of us are glaring at one another as we breathe heavily.

“Matthias, dear, let her go for now. You know where she lives and works. Give her some time to cool off and wrap her brain around it all. Not everyone is like me,” his mother gently says.

“And Adalisa? If you need anything, you are more than welcome to come here and ask anything. I know this is strange, but we are here for you. It’s going to be okay. ”

Matthias stands and holds his hand out, but I don’t take it as I leave the booth.

“Thanks for not feeding me breakfast.” I roll my eyes as I walk away from them and out of the restaurant.

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Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 1:40 pm

ADALISA

“Y ou’ve got a package!” I yell when Margery walks through the door of the store.

“A package? Me? From who?” she asks as she makes her way toward me.

Her face turns pensive as if she’s thinking about something very serious. I’ve seen that look too many times on her. Margery is thinking about the day Ethan died and how she wasn’t there for him.

“Margery?” I call out. “Are you okay?”

Margery smiles at me and closes the distance between us. “So, does the package say who it’s from?” she asks, placing her handbag under the counter.

“It doesn’t,” I reply, looking down at the box.

Strange, but it wouldn’t be the first time a package has been dropped off by the courier with only a name on it. Normally, there is a dispatch note explaining the contents.

She looks at me, her eyebrows furrowed. “Then, how do you know it’s for me? It could be for you.”

“Silly! It has your name on it,” I reply sarcastically.

“Did somebody give it to you?” she asks, taking a step closer to me.

I hold the box out for her to grab. “Nope. It was sitting out front when I got here. Had your name on it. I figured they knew what time I got in and left it a couple of minutes before. Come on, open it!”

Margery tentatively grabs it from me and places it on the counter. “Today really isn’t the day. Maybe we can say it’s for you? I’m not expecting anything,” Margery gently says and sighs.

“Feeling unwell?” I worry.

“Thankfully, no, but I have no doubt I will at some point. It’s been a while since I was last ill. I hope I don’t get sick soon.” Margery looks down at the package in wonder.

“Just take some preventive medicine: multivitamin, vitamin C, zinc. Get ahead of it,” I list everything that I can think of to ward off a virus.

“I’m not going to do that. You know I don’t really like taking medicine. Not unless I absolutely have to.” She rolls her eyes.

“But it could help you.” I give her a knowing look.

I don’t like taking pills either, but I do if I’m feeling like I’m going to get sick. I can’t afford to get sick, not when I’m the only one to look after myself. I don’t have anyone else to rely on.

“Or I could just eat right, get enough sleep, exercise, and drink enough water,” Margery suggests.

I raise my hands in the air. “Okay. Okay. I’m not going to change your mind. That’s fine. Now, will you please open the package? It has your name in bold, and I want to

know what it is.”

Margery exhales and turns the package around, her breathing stopping as she looks at her name.

“Well, are you going to open it?” I ask.

“Uh, yeah.”

Margery grabs a pair of scissors and cuts through the tape. I watch, trying not to hover to see what’s inside. It’s not my box, even though I want it to be. I never get any packages delivered to me. She pulls a multicolored zebra out of the box.

“Oh, my goodness. That is so cute! And look, it has your name embroidered on it!” I squeal. “Wait, what is that?”

I squint my eyes, trying to see if I’m really seeing what I think I am. That can’t be, could it?

“Is that a binkie?” I questioned.

“Do you know who gave it to you? And why would they put a binkie around the neck of the zebra?” I ask. “I know you said you’ve been on a couple of dates. Maybe one of them gave it to you. But the binkie wouldn’t make any sense.”

Margery nods but stays silent for a couple of minutes. “I don’t know. Maybe it could be one of them, but I don’t know,” she whispers. “I’m going to keep it though, just in case I see one of them again. Then, I can ask.”

“Why don’t you just message them?”

She shakes her head. “Not happening. I don’t want them to think that they need to send me gifts.

They also don’t know that I’m talking to multiple people.

I’m not dating any of them. They don’t know I’m keeping my options open.

And as for the binkie, I have talked about wanting kids.

Maybe one of them sent it as a ‘I want to have kids with you’ gift?

It is weird, and if I see one of them, I’ll ask if they bring it up. ”

I don’t really understand why she won’t just message them. It’s a simple question to ask. If they don’t, then she rules out who it might be. But it’s not my life so I can’t do anything about it.

“How was your date last night?” I ask as Margery puts the stuffed animal back in the box.

“It was all right, but the person was missing something,” Margery answers with a shrug.

“What do you think he was missing?” I inquire.

“I don’t know. He’s not the love of my life,” Margery says, sitting beside me. “I know. I know.”

“Nobody is going to be Ethan. You need to get that out of your head,” I tell her, looking at her sympathetically.

“I know, but it’s hard. I grew up with Ethan. We talked about getting married. We were going to get married,” she sighs.

I feel bad for her, I really do. “But now you can’t. It’s harsh, but someone needs to tell you. You need to stop comparing every man to Ethan. Because they won’t be Ethan, and you’re going to end up disappointed every single time.”

“I know. I’m trying to, but it’s so difficult,” Margery replies. “Let’s just get to work. We’ve got things to stock, and no doubt customers are going to be flocking in soon.”

“I have food for an Adalisa?” a man announces, walking into the store.

My eyebrows pinch together as I stand up. “Food? I didn’t order anything. I don’t eat food I don’t prepare so it can’t be for me.”

“I was told to come here with food for Adalisa. A man has already paid me and given me a tip. Have a good day.” He hands me the food and leaves.

I sit down and look at the bag in my hand. I know who it is. Out of spite, I want to not eat it, show him I don’t need him to take care of me, but my stomach has been grumbling all morning. Not having breakfast really left me hungry. The whole interaction with his mom threw off my morning.

“You ordered food and didn’t get me any?” Margery asks. “I would have paid you, you know that.”

I shake my head, still staring at the food sitting on the counter in front of me. “I didn’t order this.”

Margery sits beside me and smiles. “So, who bought it? I thought you didn’t know many people in New York.”

“I don’t,” I mumble.

When I open the bag, I see a note placed on top of the take-out container. I don’t dare pick it up, not wanting Margery to see the note and ask me a million questions. I’m not ready for them, not when I haven’t really been able to focus on anything this morning.

“Is it from the guy who sent you the bracelet the other day?” Margery asks. “Is he trying to make up for lost time? Wait!”

I look at her. “Wait, what?”

“Was he at your house last night? Did you guys do the nasty, and he didn’t allow you to eat breakfast, so now he’s giving you food as an apology?” Margery narrows her eyes at me.

“No, he wasn’t, and no he didn’t,” I brush it off.

She can’t know. There was no way Margery knows that Matthias was at my house this morning, that he woke me up to the best sex I’ve ever had. She can’t possibly know that. She doesn’t go out and eat very often, so she wouldn’t have seen me and Matthias together.

“Are you lying to me?”

I hate it when she asks me that. I’ve only lied to her a handful of times, but she always seems to know when I am. How? I don’t know, and it infuriates me. Maybe she has some type of superpower.

“No, I’m not,” I reply, keeping my voice calm and collected like it was before the delivery. “He wasn’t at my house last night.”

I'm not lying about that part. But the part about us having sex this morning and him not letting me eat breakfast—that was all a lie.

“Are you going to eat it?” she asks. “Or are you going to let it go to waste?”

“You have a lot of questions.” I look at her, exasperated.

Margery always has a lot of questions when it comes to anything with me. I love her, but sometimes she can get a bit overwhelming. Especially when it's at work.

“Sorry, I'm just curious. You never go out and meet people, yet you want to find that right person for you.

I know you just went to the speed dating fiasco, but has anything else happened after it?

No,” Margery points out. “I'm just worried about you.

I want you to be happy, and sometimes I do have a lot of questions, but they come from the goodness of my heart,” she mutters at the end.

I sigh. “I know you do, and that's why we are great friends. You don't need to worry about my love life.”

Her eyebrows rise. “I don't? Are you and this guy serious?”

“No!” I raise my voice. “Oh no. We are not. We are just friends. I wouldn't even really consider us friends.”

I shiver at the thought of Matthias and I being serious. I don't know whether it's from pleasure thinking about it or genuine worry that it might happen, with or without my

consent. But Matthias already thinks we are forever.

Margery's shoulders slump. "Oh. I was really looking forward to meeting him. I was getting excited for you. Sorry, that sounds bad, but I want you to be happy. I want you to thrive and live your life. I don't want you to always come into work and then go home. That is no way to live."

I raise one eyebrow at her and wait for her to realize what she is saying, but she just looks at me. "Margery."

"What... Oh," she whispers.

"Yeah, oh. You want me to be happy and not only work and go home, but you literally described your life," I tell her. "I'm not trying to be rude, but—girl—you are literally talking about yourself as well. Do you not want what's best for you as well?"

She lifts her hands in frustration. "That's why I've been going on a couple of dates. I'm trying to get back out there."

"And I am super proud of you," I praise her honestly. "When you told me you were, I jumped up and down in my apartment."

Silence rings out around us, and I look back at my food. It smells so delicious.

"Why don't you go into the back room and eat it? I'll watch over the shop."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah, I'm sure. Go and eat breakfast from the man you aren't seeing," she giggles.

"Brat," I mutter as I stand, grabbing the food and making my way to the break room.

One thing Matthias and his mother saved me from this morning was eating in front of people. While I can do it, I don't really like doing it. The stress of people seeing you take a bite... yeah, no, I can't do it. That's one of the reasons why I don't eat out.

Too many eyes watching.

Once I flop onto the couch in the break room, I take the note out.

Matthias

Eat breakfast. My mother made it especially for you and felt bad that you didn't have anything to eat this morning. Enjoy, and we'll talk later.

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Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 1:40 pm

ADALISA

“Y ou’re okay,” I whisper as I press the elevator button in my apartment building.

I really don’t like this elevator. It’s ancient, and the doors open really slowly. Sometimes they get stuck, and it takes forever for it to reach the floor perfectly.

I hold on for dear life as I ride it to my apartment. I’ve never got stuck, but I’ve heard several people getting stuck in it before. The hours it would take for them to fix it and get me out are too much to even think about.

Maybe I shouldn’t take it today, but as I look at the stairs, my legs protest. This afternoon was filled with walking back and forth in the shop, putting things away and helping customers, never leaving me time to sit down.

Then, walking to my apartment afterward was brutal on my feet.

I just want to lay down in my bed and not get up until the morning.

“Come on,” I whine, pressing the button impatiently again. “Hurry up.”

The universe seems to be against me today, or really this week. Nothing seems to be going my way, and it is exhausting.

“Finally,” I sigh as I walk into the elevator.

I grip the railing as I face the doors, which start to close. Everything is going to be

okay. Everything is going to be all right. I'm going to get to my apartment floor and make it out. Nothing is going to happen to me.

I suck in a breath as the elevator starts to move.

"See," I mutter. "Everything is o?—"

I scream as the elevator stops, my grip on the railing becoming tighter. Everything is still okay. Maybe someone else is waiting to get on the elevator, and we are just stopping.

But as the seconds pass, I realize that's not the case. I punch the emergency button, praying and hoping someone is in the building to hear it, so they come and get me. I slide down to the floor, wrapping my arms around my legs and slowly rock back and forth.

"Everything is okay," I whisper to myself. "Everything is going to be okay. They'll be here before I know it to get me out. I just need to be patient and stay as calm as I can while I wait."

I take a deep breath in, trying to keep myself calm, but the minutes tick by and no one answers, I realize that no one is coming.

No. I can't panic. Everything is going to be okay, it has to be.

Ring. Ring. Ring.

I cry out in pain and surprise as my head hits the wall, and I quickly grab my phone, answering it without seeing who it is.

"Adalisa, where are you?" Matthias' voice comes through the phone.

“I’m in an elevator,” I whisper shakily as terror starts to crawl its way through me.

“Little bit, where?” His voice is deep. “Where are you?”

Tears prick my eyes, and I suck in a breath.

“Adalisa, I need you to listen to my voice,” Matthias says, encouraging me. “Can you do that for me? Can you listen to Daddy’s voice?”

I nod.

“Adalisa?”

“Yes,” I whisper, closing my eyes tightly as I try to concentrate on him and nothing else.

“Good girl. You are such a good girl for me,” he purrs. “Can you tell me where you are?”

“Elevator in my apartment,” I quietly rush out.

“I’m on my way. We’re going to stay on the phone until I get there. I’m going to get you out.” He talks me through what he’s going to do to rescue me. “You are going to be okay, and nothing is going to happen. Do you understand?”

I nod.

“Words, Adalisa.” His voice is firm.

“Yes, I understand,” I reply.

My breathing becomes easier as he continues to talk to me, distracting me from where I am. His voice is soothingly deep, and if I weren't in an elevator, I would fall right asleep. Maybe I should call him when I'm having a hard time falling asleep.

"No," I mumble.

"What was that?" Matthias asks. "No to what?"

I suck in a breath. "Nothing," I whisper.

I need to not think about falling asleep to his voice. I need to not talk to him. I need to stay away from him, yet he coming is to rescue me.

But it doesn't mean anything.

After this, I'm going to go back to not talking to him. I have to. I don't want him. He's dangerous, and I don't need that in my life.

"Adalisa." His voice holds warning. "Tell Daddy what you were saying no to."

"I can't," I squeak, my hand slamming onto the ground. "I need out."

I look around the elevator, feeling the walls closing in on me.

"Adalisa!" he growls. "Focus on me. Close your eyes like a good girl and listen to my voice. Nothing else matters right now besides you obeying me."

I close my eyes and focus on his voice.

"Good girl. I'm almost at your building," he gently reassures.

“I don’t know,” I whisper, feeling like an elephant is sitting on my chest. “Please.”

“You’re okay. You are doing such a good job, and you will continue to do a good job. It’s what I demand of you,” he states.

“I’m not always going to follow what you say,” I grumble.

If he were here right in front of me, I would be glaring at him. I would also punch him in the arm and tell him fat chance of me doing anything he says. But that was all if he was here, which he isn’t.

“You will,” he says. “My voice may sound a little further away, but I’m still here. I’m just going to try to open the elevator doors.”

He continues to talk about everything he’s doing, letting me listen to his voice. Every once in a while, it strains as he tries to open the elevator doors, but then it goes back to normal. How much longer am I going to be in here for? Will he be able to get me out?

“Open your eyes, Little bit.” Matthias’ voice sounds so close yet so far away. “Come on, Adalisa.”

I crack my eyes open and stare into his chocolate-brown eyes. A smile breaks out across his face.

“Such a good girl,” he whispers. “I’m here. I’m not going anywhere.”

Without thinking, I launch myself at him, wrapping my arms and legs around him.

“Wow, you’re okay.” He holds me close. “I’m right here.”

He stands. and I grip him tighter, not wanting to let him go.

“You’re okay,” he coos in my ear. “You’re out of the elevator. We’re on your floor.”

“I never want to take that elevator again.” My voice cracks, and tears pool in my eyes. “Never again.”

I never want to go into another elevator, period. There is no way anyone can pay me to get into one after that terrifying ordeal.

Nope.

“You don’t have to go back on it if you don’t want to. No one will make you,” Matthias tells me. “I won’t force you to do that.”

He takes several steps before stopping and running his hand up and down my back.

“Keys,” he mumbles.

They are in my hands, but I don’t want to let him go to try and give them to him. It would require me to leave some part of his body, and I’m not ready for that.

“It’s okay,” he tells me. “Take your time.”

I clench my jaw, inhaling deeply, before I make myself open my hand and give him the keys. It doesn’t take him long to get into my apartment and set me on my bed.

“I’m going to get you some water. I want you to sit here and get comfortable with the blanket wrapped around you,” he gently says.

I hold my breath as I let go of him, watching him walk away into my kitchen.

My mind starts reeling about everything. Matthias has my phone number. Matthias got me out of the elevator faster than I thought I was going to get out of there. He came for me when I needed him. I shouldn't want that. I shouldn't be happy he did that.

"Here's that glass of water," Matthias announces, walking back into the room. "Are you okay?"

I look at him, not knowing what to say. He hands me the glass, and I just look at it. How am I supposed to answer that question?

"Adalisa." He sits next to me. "Are you okay?"

"Am I okay?" I repeat his question. "Am I okay?"

His face is blank, but his eyes have worry flowing through them. "Yes, Adalisa. Are you all right?"

I shrug, looking down at the water in my hands. "No, I'm not okay. Nothing about today has been okay!"

Matthias stays silent, and I take that as my cue to continue speaking.

"The sex was amazing. You taking me out to breakfast was not how I planned it to go, and not really what I wanted. You buying me breakfast and having it delivered wasn't either.

You shouldn't be doing this. I shouldn't want this," I quickly grit out.

"You need to go. You need to leave my apartment right now!"

I place the water down on the nightstand and turn to Matthias.

“Get out. I don’t want you here anymore,” I point toward the door. “Get out of my fucking apartment.”

He rises from my bed and cups my face. I try to get out of it, but his grip tightens, keeping me in place.

“If you go out, make sure you wear the bracelet. It will protect you,” he reminds me.

“Protect me?” I laugh. “How will a tiny bracelet protect me? Everyone has one of these.”

It’s a simple bracelet; anyone on the street could have one of these. How does he expect something like that to protect me?

“Trust me, it will,” he replies. “You know I’m a dangerous man; I have enemies. My boss has enemies. Wear the bracelet when you go out. Promise me.”

I yank my face out of his touch and glare at him. “I’m not promising you anything. Now, get out of my apartment.”

He sighs and stands to his full height, giving me a pointed look before he walks out of my room.

I hold my breath and wait to hear my front door open and close.

My shoulders sag as I hear it does, letting go of the breath and picking up the glass of water.

Bringing it up to my lips, I pause right before drinking and pull away.

Has he drugged it? I didn't see him make it or hear him pour the water.

I don't know Matthias at all and he was just in my apartment... again. I was so out of it, and he could have done anything. Did he place cameras in my apartment? I shake my head. He wouldn't have had the opportunity to do that. Unless I was really out of it and lost track of time.

I place the cup down and fall back onto my bed, taking a deep, steadying breath. Too much is going on, and I can't fully comprehend everything. Will I ever be able to when it comes to Matthias?

"I don't know," I whisper, looking up at the ceiling.

ADALISA

“Have none of them confessed to giving you the stuffed zebra stuffy?” I ask, walking into the store.

Margery looks up and shakes her head. “No, they haven’t. I don’t think it’s one of them.”

“What makes you think that?” I start to unpack my lunch from my bag.

I’m hoping that, if Matthias is watching me, he sees that I’m eating, so he doesn’t buy anything for me. I don’t need him coming in with a disguise or having someone else deliver the food. What if he got one of his men to bring it to me?

I still as I think about that. No, he wouldn’t. He said he works for someone, so he wouldn’t have men to look after me or do anything like that. Or would he?

No, I can’t think about that. I need to come up with a way to get away from him, to find a way to escape and get him to stop wanting me. That’s what I need to do. I don’t need to think about him anymore.

“Adalisa?” Margery touches my shoulder.

“Sorry, in my head.” I give her a small smile. “I was just thinking about lunch and how I can’t wait to eat it,” I lie. “Anyway, what makes you think it wasn’t one of your dates who gave it to you?”

She shrugs. “I don’t know. It’s just a feeling. They don’t know where I work. And unless they followed me, they wouldn’t know. And if it was them, why wouldn’t they just give it to me in person?”

Those are all very good points, I hadn’t thought about those.

“Okay, so then who could it be?” I ask, sitting down. “Could it be an ex? Someone you know from high school? An uncle you don’t know about?”

She shakes her head and sighs. “I don’t have any ex-boyfriends. I only dated Ethan... he was the only one. And as for people I know in high school, I didn’t have many friends. They didn’t want to be friends with me.”

“Uncles or aunts?”

“Nope. I don’t talk to them, and they don’t like stuffed animals.” She rolls her eyes. “But I don’t know who else it could be.”

“A secret admirer. Maybe someone walked into the store, you helped them out, and they took an interest in you. Or they could have been walking past and saw you through the window,” I suggest, but immediately regret it.

That’s just how Matthias found me. He saw me, walked into the store, and then stalked me for a little while. Now I can’t get rid of him.

Margery laughs. “I don’t think that’s the case. This stuffed zebra is like the one I have at home... the exact same.”

My shoulders shrug. “So it’s a coincidence. Things happen like that all the time.”

She looks at me, unsure, and I smile.

“You can’t be paranoid. It’s just a zebra,” I suggest. “Whoever gave it to you will show their face eventually, and you’ll realize that you’ve known them for a long time. You don’t need to worry.”

“I guess,” she mumbles, looking off into the distance.

“Not I guess, but I know. You are going to look back at all of this and laugh at how paranoid you are being.” I sit back and relax. “Everything is going to be fine. It’s harmless what the person is doing.”

Margery has something harmless while I’m over here getting told I belong to Matthias, his mother says not to fight it, and he breaks into my apartment.

He also watches me and has done for a while, changing his appearance so I don’t know I’m actually talking to him.

How much else does he do that I don’t know about?

I’ve tried not to think about it since I don’t know him. I don’t know what he’s capable of. The possibilities are endless, which is scary to think about. Has he been in my apartment before waking me up? The only way into my apartment is through the front door.

I’m on the fourth floor, so unless he scaled the side of the building to get in through my window, he got in through the front door. Does he have a key?

“Adalisa?” Margery places a hand on my shoulder.

I look at her. “Sorry, in my thoughts again. What did I miss?”

In my very important thoughts.

If he had a key to my apartment, he would have used it when he got me out of the elevator, right? He wouldn't have needed me to hand mine over. Unless that is how he got my keys. Asked me for it, takes them to a different room while he gets me water and copies them in foam to later get them made.

How could I have been so stupid? I gave him everything he needed to get into my apartment and do whatever he wanted. Did he also place cameras around my rooms while getting me the water?

I take a deep breath, trying to stop myself from panicking in front of Margery.

Now is not the time to think about everything Matthias could have possibly done.

When I get home, I'm going to have to check every room to make sure nothing is out of.

Maybe I can stop by a camera shop and see if there is a machine that finds little cameras.

There has to be.

"I was just talking about my plans," Margery chuckles. "I know my life is boring, but you didn't have to completely check out."

I wince. "Sorry. I didn't mean to. I'm just not all here right now. I didn't get much sleep last night."

"Your friend been on your mind a lot? Are you going to go ask him out, and then fall in love?" she asks, winking.

If only she knew that this friend I am talking about isn't a friend at all. He is someone

I want to stay away from, someone very dangerous.

“No, that is not happening. He and I are never getting together,” I reiterate. “We can’t. We don’t mesh well.”

Her whole body slumps. “I was rooting for him. I thought you guys would have made a good couple.”

“You don’t even know him.” I shake my head. “You’ve never met him before.”

“Yeah, but him mailing the bracelet to you. Come on. And him telling you it’s going to keep you safe.” She gives me a pointed look and looks down at my wrists. “Which I see you aren’t wearing. What if he finds out you?”

“A small bracelet cannot give protection. It’s just like any other one you can get at any corner store.

It wasn’t anything special.” I roll my eyes.

“He insisted I wear it again, but I haven’t, and I don’t think I will.

No one is going to look at my wrist and back off because they see me wearing a silver bracelet. ”

She shrugs. “You never know. Did you leave it at home or did you bring it with you?”

Sighing, I pick up my bag and rummage through it. “Here it is. I brought it just in case, but honestly, I think tomorrow I’m not going to. It’s pointless. It doesn’t signify anything.”

I spent so many hours last night looking at it, trying to see if there was a hidden inscription on it that someone could see. But there isn't. It's just a plain silver bracelet that shows whether Matthias can fuck me in the middle of the night or not.

That is all. "So why don't you just wear it. It's not like it's going to harm you," Margery encourages.

"It may not harm me, but I'm not going to give him the satisfaction of seeing me wear it when he won't tell me why it will keep me safe.

There is no point. What is he keeping from me?

"I counter. "This is why we won't do well together.

He doesn't tell me things, and I don't like to be kept in the dark. "

I also don't enjoy being claimed.

Lies , my inner voice whispers in my head.

I sigh. I love being claimed. It's so hot when a man comes up to me and tells me I am theirs and no one else's. I want that, especially with Matthias, but there are so many red flags. I don't know who he is; he's stalked me, got into my apartment, and decided that I'm his without consulting me.

But maybe I didn't want to be consulted.

No .

This is not happening. I am not going down this road. I need to be strong and stay with my original plan. I need to leave. I need to get off his radar, stay low, and when

he forgets about me, I can come back. That is the only thing I need to do right now.

“I don’t see a problem with it. I think it’s kind of hot, him claiming you and all. I think you should go with it if you really want to,” Margery whispers.

“Can we not talk about him? I’m trying not to think about him for at least an hour or more,” I whine.

How is that working out? It’s not. Matthias is constantly on my mind, and I can’t get him out of it. He knew, and he acted all smug about it.

Margery cracks a smile. “Okay, whatever you want. If you do want to talk about him, you let me know, and we can. Maybe later you can tell me what he looks like, or better yet, if you can show me a picture. I will gladly look at him.”

“He could be butt ugly,” I mumble.

“You being friends with someone butt ugly? I don’t think so. You aren’t mean, and you just attract hot men. You always will. They take one look at you and know you are everything they need and want.” Margery smirks brightly. “I don’t know how you aren’t dating or married.”

I shrug. “Haven’t found the right person yet.”

“And you will... eventually. You just need to take a leap of faith. Maybe your friend is the right person for you. Have you guys tried dating before?” she asks.

“No, we haven’t. He’s wanted to, but I don’t want to ruin the friendship if anything happens,” I lie.

How big is this lie going to get?

Margery places a hand on my shoulder, giving it a little squeeze.

“I think you should really think about it and then decide. Maybe you should have a conversation and let him know that. I know a lot of people who were friends before, started dating, didn’t work out, and are still great friends to this day. ”

“Okay, fine. Maybe I’ll message him and see if we can meet up this weekend to talk about things,” I lie once again.

I have no intention of messaging him. If anything, this weekend I am going to come up with a plan on how to get away and be undetected. Someone in New York has to know what to do and where to go, so he can’t find me.

How much cash do I have in my bank? I’m going to have to withdraw all of it since I won’t be able to work.

Maybe I can tell my boss I’m going on a little vacation and lay low that way.

Then, when he is looking for me, I can stay away and come back to work a few months later.

I could change my hair color and appearance to make myself look different.

He won’t know that.

“Good. I really think you should do this. I don’t think you will regret it,” she gently says.

I hope I don’t.

ADALISA

Several days have gone by without hearing from Matthias. Maybe he has forgotten about me. Maybe leaving the apartment before I normally do, not wearing the bracelet, and keeping a distance from the places I normally go—not my work though—has kept him away from me.

That is what I like to think, but he could have just been busy. Maybe this is the perfect time to leave on my mini-vacation to get away from him. It has to be, but I can't just leave, not when Margery needs me and especially not when work is starting to get busy.

"I think someone is following me," Margery whispers from next to me.

My eyebrows furrow. "What do you mean?"

"I think someone is stalking me. Leaving me presents. I can feel their stare." She looks at me, worry painted all over her face.

"How much sleep have you gotten?" I ask.

"Just a couple of hours last night since I got another stuffed animal. I brought it in, and it just kept staring at me. I don't know what to do. They are all the same stuffed zebra," she rambles.

"All the same color? Everything is the same?" I look in her direction. "Maybe they had a mix up at the store and you got another one by mistake. I wouldn't worry about

it too much. He's going to come forward soon."

She shakes her head, wrapping her arm around herself.

"Take some sleeping pills tonight and get some rest. Do you want to go home and sleep?" I ask. "I can look after the shop if you want. Boss doesn't have to know you weren't here."

"I can't. I shouldn't. I need to be here and I don't want to be alone with my thoughts," she mumbles.

"But you need your sleep. Maybe you should get some food. Fill your belly up with something warm and then go to sleep. I think that will help," I suggest. "But I really think you should go home and sleep. Maybe you should take a vacation."

If she takes a vacation, then it means I wouldn't be able to, but Margery looks pretty rough. Out of the two of us, she needs it more. And it will give me more time to think everything through. Get everything in order so I can get the most out of my escape.

"I don't know," she whispers, looking at me, unsure.

"Have you called the police?" I ask.

"Yes, I have. They told me it was just a secret admirer and to let it run its course. But I don't think it is. This is different." Her voice contains a note of panic.

I place my hands on her shoulders. "Sometimes, it can take a little while for a secret admirer to come forward. It can take a lot of courage to tell a girl you like them. I had a guy in high school take more than a month to get the courage to talk to me. He made me a paper flower every single day and left it in my locker."

“Really?” she looks at me thoughtfully.

“Yes, really. Why don’t you go get something to eat and then go home and fall asleep? I think it will help you,” I tell her, pulling her into my embrace and hugging her tightly.

I look over at the front door of the shop, making sure no one is coming into the shop. They don’t need to see Margery like this; no one does. But as I look out the windows, I suck in a breath.

Matthias.

He is standing outside the window, looking directly at me. My hold on Margery tightens a little as we continue to stare at each other. I thought he had forgotten about me.

I look away from Matthias and pull away from Margery. “Now, I want you to go home and get some sleep. You will feel better tomorrow, I promise. Make sure you get some food before.”

Margery nods and grabs her purse. Matthias walks in as Margery leaves, neither one of them gives the other a glance. My eyes stay on him as he slowly walks toward me, his eyes never leaving me.

“What do you want?” I ask. “You need to leave. You are not welcome here.”

But it falls on deaf ears.

“Matthias, I’m serious. I have cameras here that are capturing your face right now. I will take it to the police. I don’t care what you think. I told you to leave, and you aren’t, which is trespassing.” I’m making stuff up as I word vomit.

I have no idea if it is trespassing or not. I do know I have the power to kick anyone out of the store if I need to.

“No,” is all he says.

“No?” I take a step back.

Matthias stops in front of me and smiles.

“No.” He leans forward and takes a big breath. “I’ve missed the smell of you.”

Abruptly, I hold my hands in the air. “Stop. Do not say things like that to me. Do not talk to me. Leave right now.”

I need to be strong. I need to get him away from me.

“No,” he repeats. “I will say things like that to you if I want to. They aren’t bad. They are showing my appreciation for you and how much I have missed you.”

I shake my head, but he’s not wrong.

“I think you like them, but you are trying so hard to stay away from me and prove to yourself that you don’t need me.

That’s okay, I like a girl with a bit of fight in her,” he purrs.

“We are going to have so much fun together. But I am a patient man and will wait for you, don’t worry.

I’ll just need to work a little harder to show you that we are perfect together.”

I push against his chest, trying to get him away from me. “We are not perfect together. You and I will never be together. I won’t allow it. Get it through your thick skull that it will never happen.”

He smiles.

Fucking smiles at me.

“Oh, but baby, we are perfect together. You can see it, but you don’t want to admit it. That’s okay. Not everyone wants to accept things immediately, but you will see it eventually,” he declares. “Just wait. Everything is going to work out with us.”

I push at his chest again, trying to get him away from me, but he won’t budge. What does he do to make him so solid? It’s infuriating that I can’t get him away from me.

“What do you want?” I ask, trying to change the subject.

Maybe if we talk about this, he will get away from me. The sooner I get through what he wants, the sooner he is going to leave my shop.

“You can’t get me away from you that easily.” He stands to his full height. “Don’t rush our conversation.”

“Won’t be a conversation much longer,” I say under my breath.

He grips my chin with his fingers. “You will not mumble in front of me. If you are going to say something, you are going to say it to me. Understand?”

“Yes,” I reply.

“Yes, Daddy.”

I stare at him, my eyes widening a little. Does he really expect me to call him Daddy? There is no way I am going to do that, not in a million years.

“Yes, Daddy,” he repeats.

“Yes, I understand,” I tell him instead.

I want to call him Daddy so badly, but I’m not going to give him the satisfaction.

Not yet. Hopefully never. Never would I have thought of calling my significant other Daddy, but Matthias makes it seem so easy.

Or so I think. I haven’t called him that, but the way I want to and the way I’ve almost, shows me how easily I want to.

His grip on my chin tightens a fraction. “You will one day. I can see it in your eyes. You want to call me Daddy so badly, but you are holding yourself back. You are holding yourself back from me.”

I am, and for good reason. But I don’t tell him that. It will only make him want to try harder and want me more. I don’t want him figuring out what I am trying to do and stopping me.

Nope.

“Did you need something?” I ask, arching one of my eyebrows. “Or are you just wasting my time?”

“Sassy,” he murmurs. “I wanted to take you out to lunch, but I can see you can’t leave the shop since no one else is here. That’s okay, I can go get food for us and we can eat in here.”

“Oh, too bad. I brought my own lunch, so we can’t eat lunch together.” I fake the sadness, but inside I’m so happy.

“That’s okay. I can get someone to grab me food and we can eat together.” He smiles innocently at me.

“I really can’t. I don’t have time to sit down to eat. I have stuff to do around the shop since Margery is gone,” I rush to say.

“Margery,” he mumbles.

“Do you know her?” I ask.

Please say no. Please say no.

“No,” he replies. “Her name is familiar. I know a guy who is in love with a girl named Margery.”

“There are a lot of people named Margery,” I nervously giggle. “Anyway, you should go. I’ve got work to do and will be walking around and eating while I work.”

“No.”

I clench my jaw, hating that he keeps telling me no.

“You are not going to eat while you work. You will sit down in a break room and eat your lunch with me. Then you can work. It’s not good for you to eat while you’re busy,” he tells me, finally letting go of my chin.

“You can’t tell me what to do,” I bark at me.

“I can and will. You are not going to eat while you work. It is not good for you,” he repeats, saying each word slower this time.

“I’m not a two-year-old you can order around. I can do what I want because I am an adult.” I take a step back. “Now, please go. I don’t need you here.”

He opens his mouth, but before he can get a word out, his phone rings. I smirk and he just stares at me.

“Aren’t you going to answer that?” I ask. “Wouldn’t want you to miss something important because you are hanging out with me.”

“This is not over.” He looks into my eyes before lifting his phone and answering it.

I sit in the chair behind the counter, taking a deep breath and letting myself relax. I really need to get away from him. I need to figure out how I’m going to make him forget about me when he is so hell-bent on keeping me as his.

“I need to find a way to disappear,” I whisper to myself.

But it’s going to take money, and I can’t just spend all my savings on it.

Not when I have to think about hotels, transportation, and food.

I groan and close my eyes for a couple of seconds.

Maybe I can look this up online and figure it out myself.

Someone has to have written about it before, right?

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MATTHIAS

I don't want to leave Adalisa alone, but I know I have to.

I've promised Ethan that if Margery ever called the police, I would answer the phone and make sure the actual police didn't get any more calls.

He doesn't want her to look bad when she keeps calling them about the stalker she thinks she has.

Chuckling, I shake my head and walk away from Margery's house. It was easy to convince her that she has a secret admirer and that she was being paranoid from a known rapist coming after her. Ethan was not happy about that, but I was in time to save her.

That time.

I never want something like that to happen to Adalisa.

Thankfully, she is a little more aware of her surroundings and can take care of herself, but I still worry about her.

She didn't know I was following her for months, didn't know I walked into her store several times with slightly different appearances, and still doesn't realize that I am following her around whenever I can.

But something inside of me enjoys that she doesn't fully realizing it yet.

“She’s been talked off the ledge,” I tell Ethan over the phone. “I told her it was another secret admirer and that she was stressed about Diego coming after her. I told her to go on a vacation to relax and get over everything.”

“Thank you,” Ethan replies and promptly hangs up.

Now, I get to convince Adalisa to be with me, give her the chance to realize she gets to decide if she wants to be with me or not—without fully knowing she doesn’t have a choice. I saw her, and now she is mine. No one else’s.

Mine.

Pulling out my phone, I look at the picture of Adalisa sleeping on my screen. “Soon, Little bit. Soon you’ll be at my house. Soon you’ll be fully mine.”

“Matthias?” Ethan calls out.

I make my way toward his office and say “Yes, boss?” as I walk into the room.

“Has Margery called you recently?”

“No, she hasn’t,” I reply.

Not since the last time she called. I talked her down from her thinking it was a stalker to believing it’s a secret admirer. It was relatively easy doing so when she was panicked, but I also know she still thinks it’s a stalker.

Deep down, she knows it’s Ethan, but she doesn’t want to say his name. Not when she thinks he’s dead, and people will look at her pitifully.

“How did she react when you answered the phone and also appeared on her

doorstep?" Ethan inquires.

"She was certain it wasn't a secret admirer.

She did question why I answered the call, but I gave a phony reply.

One she believed in the moment. She thought I was the police," I reply.

"I wondered she would put together that police officers never answer nine-one-one calls, but she didn't.

But if she had questioned further, I had a whole list of things to say. Make her believe anything I said."

A tiny part of me hates that I am helping Ethan do this to Margery, but we are fucked-up men. We don't do things normally. Never have been and we never will be. Something I really like about us.

Ethan trusts me with this because he knows I can convince anyone of anything if I really want to. Adalisa is taking longer than I thought, but it is exciting that she isn't just agreeing and doing what I say.

"And that's why I send you on things like this when I can't show my face."

"I talked with her neighbors. Told them I was her cousin and that she was going to be getting the help she needs. Made it seem like she was crazy. They know not to call the police if anything happens," I inform Ethan.

"They won't say anything, I don't think.

Not unless they want a bullet in their head. "

It didn't take much convincing them to agree not to say anything to the real police or say anything at all. They believed my lie, and with the right incentive, they were happy to pretend like they didn't hear or see anything.

"Good. One less thing I have to worry about when I take her." Ethan relaxes in his chair.

"I told her the police have better work to do than to catch her secret admirer. The look on her face after I said that: priceless." I lower to the chair in front of him. "Have you seen her recently?"

Ethan nods and chuckles. "I've been spending most nights at her house. Watching her sleep, running my hands through her hair, whispering things when she's half-asleep. I like watching her sleep. So defenseless."

I shake my head. "I don't know how you do it."

It would be absolute torture for me to do that to myself. I've only done it a couple of times before I introduced myself into Adalisa's world.

"Watch her sleep? Toy with her brain when she's asleep? It's my favorite thing to do. To see every emotion play across her face when she finally realizes and puts together the things I have done. Music to my ears," Ethan chuckles as he thinks about what he said.

"If I were watching my girl sleep, it wouldn't just be watching. I would fuck her while she was asleep," I state, knowing I have.

Oh, when I walked into her apartment and she was wearing the bracelet for me to know she was okay.

Music to my ears. It awakened something inside of me, seeing her wear it and nothing else as she lay underneath her covers.

The feel of her smooth skin against mine as I held her close before waking her up with pleasure.

“Believe me, I understand the desire,” Ethan retorts. “To be able to just sink your dick inside of her as she’s lying there, asleep and oblivious to the things you’re about to do to her.”

“So, do it,” I announce.

Ethan shakes his head. “One day, but not today. She’s too paranoid right now.

But it’s something I want and will get. Once I have her, she’ll be clinging to me.

Depending on me when she realizes she isn’t going anywhere.

First, I need her to need me, and then I can slowly release the reins, and life can go on like it was before I died. ”

“Before she thought you were dead,” I mutter.

There was a reason for Ethan to fake his own death. The old Ethan died, and Ethan Montgomery was born. He could have kept Margery in the loop like he kept his sister in the loop. But he thought he was protecting Margery, and he was, but she has been through a lot.

“I still don’t understand how people don’t put two and two together,” I say, shaking my head.

Ethan didn't alter the way he looked. He just changed his last name, but nothing else. Ethan stayed in the shadows for a while, so people really thought he was dead. Ever so slowly, he showed his face, little by little, but no one dared to say anything.

"They think I'm a ghost when they see me. Just how I want it. But most people I grew up with moved and still think I'm dead," he replies.

I look down at my watch and smile. Almost time for me to check on Adalisa and see if she is wearing that pretty bracelet for me. I can't wait to sink my cock back inside of her, pleasuring us both. I can't wait to see her eyes flutter open, the desire flit across her face as she begs me for more.

"Got somewhere to be?" Ethan asks.

"In a couple of hours. Got a girl waiting for me," I can't help but say.

Adalisa is trying so hard not to succumb to me, but what she doesn't realize is she already has. I give her effort for trying so hard and succeeding, but she isn't getting away from me. She never will.

I shrug. "She was a one-night stand. Into the same kinks as me. I found myself visiting her. Seeing her wear the same thing she wore to signify she was open. So, I slip into her room by either the front door or fire escape window and fuck her, and then I leave."

It is partially the truth.

"So, you followed her and broke into her house."

"Yeah." I smirk.

Ethan smiles. "So, are you just going to continue to play with her, or are you eventually going to take her and make her yours?"

I shrug once again. "She wouldn't survive in this world, but I'm going to try. I've told her she is already mine."

It is a worry of mine that I haven't ever voiced. I don't want Adalisa to come into this world, but I think with her spirit, she will survive. She has to. I am going to make her.

"Fair. You could just keep her locked in your room. I'll probably be doing that with Margery," Ethan announces.

"Maybe," I mutter, not sounding interested in the idea.

Adalisa has a fire inside of her. Sticking her in a room and leaving her will only make her angry and push her away from me. Unless I drive her to despair until she begs me to let her out. Then she would depend on me.

We fall into silence for a couple of minutes. Everything is working out for Ethan, and I am excited for myself. He has been thinking about Margery since the day he faked his own death, wondering whether he is actually doing the right thing or not.

"When does the next shipment of girls arrive?" I ask.

"In a couple of days," he replies.

"Rogan onto us?"

Rogan Ricci, boss of the Ricci Crime Family and a pain in all our asses. He has been trying to find the girls with each shipment.

Ethan shakes his head. “He gave up a while ago. Probably figured he could get to the girls before we did. But they were long gone when he arrived.”

“Fucking bastard,” I growl.

Rogan Ricci is someone we all hate and don’t want any part of his behavior.

I’ve asked Ethan if I can kill him, but he always tells me no.

We don’t need the war on our hands, but if he were dead, then everything would be so much easier.

We could take over his territory and make our operation so much bigger, and we could earn a lot more.

It’s been a struggle since day one when both of our groups were made. Always at each other’s necks, trying to kill each other but never managing to. One of these days, I will succeed, and New York will be safer.

“He wants a meeting,” Ethan drops the bomb.

“What fucking for? That slimy piece of shit,” I roar.

Who is he to declare that he wants a meeting with Ethan? Not after so many years of being rivals and refusing any meet with other people.

Ethan smiles. “Wants to meet with me. I think he has Bon,” he sighs. “Going to meet with him in a week. You, Dahmere, Jason, and Clinton will be coming with me.”

I clench my jaw. Why does he have Bon? Why did Bonnie leave the sanctuary of her own home? She was safe here, where both Ethan and I could watch her.

“Sounds good to me. Just let me know when and where,” I reply.

I will take the first opportunity to shoot Rogan after he gives Bonnie back. Rogan Ricci will not survive this.

Ethan’s phone goes off, and he smiles as he chuckles at the screen.

“Let me guess, Margery did something cute,” I query as I stand up.

“Her Little side was peeking through. Sticking her tongue out at the stuffed zebras I gave her,” Ethan replies.

Ethan is completely infatuated with Margery, and I can’t blame him. She is super sweet, but she is nothing compared to Adalisa for me. Adalisa is everything I have ever wanted.

“When are you moving to the next phase?” I ask.

Ethan has phases he wants to go through with Margery, to make sure everything runs smoothly and doesn’t stray from his end goal.

“Tonight. The last stuffed zebra will be delivered tonight,” Ethan replies.

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Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 1:40 pm

ADALISA

I can't believe I told Margery I was seeing someone. More like Matthias was sneaking into my apartment and fucking me while I was half-asleep. I never thought I was going to admit to it.

Margery.

Something is going wrong with her. She has been on the edge since the first package came to the store a few weeks ago. Mumbling about someone dying in front of her when she went on her vacation and then a police officer she is wary of.

I don't know what's going on with her.

I've told her it's a secret admirer, but she is hell-bent on it being her dead ex-boyfriend, Ethan. It's getting to the point where I think she needs to go to a facility where she can recover for a little while. It's not normal to think you are seeing your dead ex-boyfriend.

It's not healthy.

What is causing her to do something like this??

I need to do some research on doctors who can help her because I am in over my head. I want her to thrive and move past Ethan like she was doing before.

What happened for her to deteriorate and hallucinate? Was it seeing the first stuffed

zebra? Did her mind start playing tricks on her then? I know it doesn't help that she hasn't been sleeping much, which is why I suggested sleeping pills to help.

"You are going to get better," I mutter.

She has to. I need Margery in my life. I need her to get better so we can do things outside of work. I need her to get better so she can come back to work, and I won't have to do this on my own. We agreed when we became friends that we would stick by each other's side, and we are going to do that.

That is not the only problem I have in my life. Matthias is another one. I haven't worn the bracelet since that day, and I keep finding notes in my apartment telling me to wear it during the day at the very least. What is Matthias so worried about? That something is going to happen to me?

Sighing, I lock up the shop and head toward the bakery. This is one of the few bakeries that stays open late and that I'm willing to eat from and trust the food. I try not to go there often, but today I need it. Things are not going the way I want them to go at all.

"Welcome to Cherie's Bakery!" a young woman greets me as I walk in.

I smile and stop in front of the display, looking over what they have left. What do I want? "Too many choices?" the girl asks.

"Yeah," I sigh. "I normally get the chocolate chip muffin, but you are all out of it. I've tried the apple pie, but it isn't my favorite."

"Go with the banana muffin," a deep voice I know all too well says in my ear.

"Matthias," I sigh once again.

“You aren’t wearing the bracelet like I told you to.” His arm wraps around my waist, pulling me into him.

The girl’s eyes are wide as she stares at Matthias, and I don’t blame her. I was the same when I first saw him. Thankfully, he doesn’t have his eyes set on her, or I would feel bad for her and tell her to run away as fast as possible.

I turn around and glare at him. “I don’t need to wear it. No one is going to know what a silver bracelet means. Everyone has one.”

“Not like that one,” he replies. “It will keep you safe if anything were to happen. Everyone in my world knows what the bracelet means, and they won’t do anything if they see it.”

I chuckle. “And what if someone hurts me who isn’t in your world? The bracelet would have done nothing.”

He pins me with a stare, but I don’t back down. His logic is flawed. Sure, people in his world are everywhere, but the likelihood of them knowing and hurting me is slim.

“We’ll take two banana muffins.” Matthias looks at the young woman.

“And a coffee with some milk and sugar, please.” I smile sweetly at her. “Thank you.”

Matthias grabs my hand, pulling me close to him once again. I glare at him but don’t pull away. Are the people in this bakery his people? Will they just smile and pretend like nothing is happening if I struggle?

I hate that I’m thinking that, but while his grip isn’t hurting me, I know it’s going to take a lot to get out of. I need to think long term. Will I exhaust myself right now and

him then do something to me later?

“Here you are.” The girl hands our order over the counter. “It’ll be twenty dollars.”

I reach into my purse to grab money, but Matthias beats me to it.

“Don’t even think about arguing with me about who is paying,” he growls quietly. “I am paying, and you will accept it.”

I leave my wallet in my purse and take my food and drink, walking out of the store without waiting for Matthias. I don’t want to be close to him. If I can get away from him before he can catch me I’ll be good.

I walk down the side of the road, making my way home. Or maybe I should head to the park and throw Matthias off. He probably thinks I’m going home, and if he sees that I’m not, he won’t know where I am. I quickly change directions, keeping my head down.

“You didn’t really think you could get away from me, did you?” Matthias asks, walking right next to me.

Groaning, my head tips back as I look up at the sky. How did he already find me?

“Do you have a tracker on me or something?” I ask, looking at Matthias.

“No, and even if I did, I wouldn’t tell you,” he replies. “But right now I don’t. You are predictable in what you are going to do. I figured you wouldn’t be going home, so I thought for a second. Then I saw you duck your head, and I just knew.”

Great. Why did I have to try to outsmart him? Why couldn’t I have just not gone and been safe in my house?

“I will always find you,” Matthias whispers in my ear. “Wherever you go, I go. You cannot hide from me.”

“I can try,” I mutter.

“Yes, you can try, but you will fail. I hunt people for a living. I will always find you.”

My mouth hangs open as I look at him. He hunts people for a living?

I can't think about that now. I need to have faith that I can get away from him. I need to believe that there is a chance, a possibility of getting out of his reach and living my life.

“But don't worry, I don't think you are going to try to run away from me. You are too good for that.” He wraps his arm around me, holding me close to him as we walk toward the park. “But I also wouldn't be surprised if you did try to run away from me. I can see the fire in your eyes.”

I'm happy he can see my determination. I want him to, but I also don't know if it's a good thing. Does he know that I am planning on leaving?

He can't possibly know that.

“What's wrong?” Matthias gently asks, the back of his finger trailing down the side of my cheek. “What's got you all quiet and tense?”

I shake my head, pulling away from his hand. I don't need him touching me and changing my mind. His touch is light and caring, but I know he isn't a good man.

Will I ever be able to get over that?

Yes.

I already am, but do I want to? I don't know. I shouldn't want to get over all the red flags he is giving. I should be running for the hills, begging people to help me.

"No, that's now how this works," Matthias tells me. "You are going to talk to me. You are going to tell me. No secrets between us."

I look at him like he's crazy. "No secrets between us? You haven't been forthcoming with a lot of things."

"But everything I've told you is the truth.

You don't need to know anything else right now.

All you need to know is to wear the bracelet when you are out, so you are protected when I'm not with you.

I need you to do that for me so I don't worry about you all the time.

"Matthias cups the side of my face. "Do you think you can do that?"

I open and close my mouth several times. It's a small thing for me to do and doesn't cost me anything extra.

"It's not an ownership thing?" I ask. "Like me wearing it shows the other men not to come near me?"

I don't know if that is a thing, but if it is, I'm not wearing it. Matthias isn't the man for me, and I'm not going to wait around for him to change; he won't, and I shouldn't want to be with him.

“First, you are not getting with any other men, so you should not be concerning yourself with them.” His voice drops an octave.

“Second, no, it’s not something to scare off other men.

It’s protection in case something happens to you.

They will see the bracelet and know not to touch you, or they will have to deal with the Montgomery Syndicate. ”

My whole body stills as he says those words. No. He can’t possibly be part of that group.

“Adalisa?” he asks.

“What did you just say?” I whisper.

“If something happens like a robbery?—”

“After that,” I interrupt him.

His fingers grip my chin, keeping my head in place as we make eye contact. “Do not... do not interrupt me or there will be consequences. Do you understand me?”

I don’t say anything, not caring about anything but what he just said.

“Do you understand me, Adalisa?” he asks again.

“Yes,” I reply, not knowing what I’m actually agreeing to.

Matthias searches my face for several seconds before he lets me go.

“Like I was saying. If something happens like a robbery and you are wearing the bracelet, they will know not to touch you or they will have to deal with the Montgomery Syndicate,” he reiterates.

“Those last two words,” I mumble, my whole body feeling weak.

This can’t be happening.

“Montgomery Syndicate,” Matthias repeats, realization flashing across his face. “Ah, you’ve heard about them.”

I weakly nod. I’ve heard about them all right. Who hasn’t? They are one of the notorious groups in New York City. It always makes me wonder when I’m walking down the street if anyone is part of them.

“We are ruthless. We all like to kill, but we don’t hurt innocent people. We help them,” Matthias says after some time. “You don’t have to be afraid of me.”

“I don’t have to be afraid of you?” I slowly ask, trying to see if he is playing a trick on me.

“You never have to be afraid of me,” he gently says, cupping my cheek. “We are together. We are meant for each other, and nothing will stop us from being together.”

I pull my face from his hand and take a step back from him. No. I can’t do this.

“Adalisa,” he warns.

“I’m going home, and you aren’t going to follow me. You are going to stay far away from me. I don’t want to see you. I sure as hell don’t want to talk to you either, so just leave me alone.” I glare at him.

Matthias takes one big step toward me, grabbing my neck and keeping me in place. My eyes go wide as I look around, waiting for someone to rescue me from this crazy man, but everyone looks away and pretends they don't see us.

His grip around my throat is firm, cutting off a little airflow, but I know it could be a lot worse.

"You don't get to tell me what to do," he growls, his face inches from mine. "You are mine, and I am yours. We will always be together. The only thing that can separate us is death."

"N-no," I whisper, taking a deep breath in.

His fingers tighten a little. "You don't get to tell me no."

Matthias lets go of me and pulls me in, wrapping his arms around me. I melt into his body, loving the heat coming off him and the way his arms feel around me, keeping me safe. I should be fighting him and trying to get away, but a couple of seconds won't hurt me.

"Now, I'm going to walk you home and make sure you get in there safely. When you leave your apartment next, I want you to wear the bracelet," he gently says.

It's weird hearing Matthias talk this way. He is anything but gentle, and it almost puts me at unease.

"Good. Now, normally I don't like to say this, but as we walk back to your apartment, I want you to eat the muffin and drink your coffee. Don't get used to it. You won't be walking and eating ever again. Not unless it's absolutely necessary," he tells me.

"You could just carry me," I mumble, not brave enough to say it any louder.

Do I want to continue to have his arms wrapped around me? Absolutely. But should I? No. With every second he has his arms wrapped around me, I feel myself succumbing to whatever he wants.

If he asked me to move in with him while he was holding me, I would probably say yes. I wouldn't be able to say no, not when I feel the safety and comfortableness of his arms wrapped around me.

It's everything I wanted in life and hoped for as a little kid. To feel safe and comfortable for the rest of my life. I never thought I was going to have it, but maybe with Matthias I will.

No.

This is not going to happen. I am not going to get with him, no matter what. I need to keep reminding myself that, so I don't wake up one day in his house unable to leave.

"If that's what you want," is all he says before I'm in the air, his arms underneath and around me. "Eat and drink like a good girl while I walk us to your apartment."

ADALISA

Worry churns inside me as I pace up and down the side of the store. Where is Margery? Why isn't she answering any of my texts or calls? It's been a week since I heard from her, and I'm starting to get worried.

I've tossed and turned with the idea of going to the cops and seeing if they can find her, but what if that gets her into even more trouble? What if she is in a dangerous situation and the police make it worse?

What if I go to the police, and Matthias thinks I'm going to talk about him, and something happens to me? Yeah, I'm not going to the police. There are too many variables, and I don't want to risk my or Margery's life.

But where could she be?

I press the call button one more time, lifting it to my ear, and waiting for her to answer.

"Please pick up," I whisper to myself. "Please be okay and pick up the phone."

I need her to be all right. I need her to be alive and safe. Maybe she is just on a little vacation, and she will be back soon. "You've reached Margery. I'm not at the phone, but please leave a message and I'll get back to you as soon as possible," Margery's voice says through the phone.

Voicemail.

Again.

Groaning, I close my eyes and take a deep breath. Maybe she really did check herself into a facility to get better. That has to be the reason she isn't answering her phone. There can't be any other reason. I won't accept it.

Margery isn't dead.

Margery hasn't been kidnapped.

That is what I am choosing to believe until I find her.

Alive.

Without thinking, I grab the store keys, my purse, and walk out of the building, locking up behind me. If Margery isn't going to contact me, then I am going to find her. She would do the same thing if I were in her situation.

"Where should I go first?" I mutter to myself.

I know there is an in-patient therapy center down the road I have been checking out. I sent her the details. Maybe she got the website information and looked it up? I don't know, but I'm going to check there first.

As I head toward the place, I keep myself vigilant, making sure no one is following me. If Margery has gotten into a bad situation, I need to make sure I keep myself safe to find her.

The closer I get to the facility, the fewer people I see walking down the street. Maybe I should have waited until I had someone to go with me. But who would have gone with me to this place? We're not in the best part of town, and I've heard rumors about

the area.

Yeah, it does sound bad when I recommended it, but all the reviews online said they were amazing. I just want Margery to get better so she can live her life to the fullest and get over Ethan.

That's all I want for Margery.

I want her to be happy. I want her to find another man to spend the rest of her life with; a man who will cherish and make her feel special.

An uneasy feeling washes over me as I stand outside the center. Maybe I shouldn't do this. Maybe I should try somewhere else. Margery wouldn't have come here without telling me unless she absolutely needed to and couldn't tell me or someone else called and got her taken here.

Reaching into my bag, I grab the silver bracelet and slip it on, feeling the weight of it around my wrist, reminding me who gave it to me.

I don't think this is going to save me if anything happens, but if Matthias finds out I'm here without the bracelet, I feel like something is going to happen.

He keeps threatening to punish me, but he hasn't yet.

At this rate, I don't think he's going to.

He seems to be all talk and no action, which is fine by me. Just means I can get away with a lot of things. Wait. All talk and no action. That means he won't actually come after me if I leave and disappear.

"Oh, this is perfect," I whisper to myself.

Happiness blossoms inside of me at the thought. This will be perfect. First, I'm going to find out what happened to Margery, and then I'm going to go into hiding until Matthias gives up on me. It's perfect.

Taking a deep breath, I head into the facility.

"Hello," A smiling woman stands behind the desk. "What can I do for you?"

An uneasy feeling falls over me as I get closer to the reception desk. Something isn't right here, but I continue forward. This is for Margery. I need to make sure she is okay and not somewhere else.

"I'm looking for someone, and I think she might be here," I cautiously say.

The girl just blinks at me, and I clasp my hands in front of me, clenching them tight as I wait for her to talk. But she doesn't. She continues staring at me as if I've grown two heads and don't know what I'm doing.

I don't.

"Her name is Margery, and I'm now realizing I'm a shit friend because I don't know her last name." My shoulders sag. "But you have probably heard of her, or well, her ex-boyfriend. Ethan. He died in a horrific car crash several years ago."

The woman's eyes slightly widen before going back to normal.

"She says she keeps seeing him, so I told her to check your facility out so she could get some sleep for a couple of days and get regulated again," I ramble.

"I haven't heard from her, and I just need to see whether she is here or isn't so I can stop stressing or continue to stress and look for her in other places. "

I run my hand through my hair, and I watch as her eyes stay on my bracelet the whole time. Is she part of Matthias' world? Does she know what this bracelet is, or is she just admiring it?

"Margery, yes, I think I do know someone is here with that name," the kind woman sweetly replies. "Let me check to see what room she is in and if you are permitted to see her."

"Adalisa is my name," I offer. "I should be on there. We are all we have to each other."

I don't know why I told her that, and I feel like I shouldn't have. It is private information.

The girl types on the computer, clicks around, before looking back up at me. "Yes, we do, and you are on the list. Let's get you to a room and then we'll grab her for you."

A smile blossoms on my face, and I sigh in relief. "Thank you so much."

"Don't mention it. Please, follow me," she says, walking behind the desk.

I follow her down a cold and darker hallway, the uneasy feeling growing in my stomach with each step I take. Several nurses walk out of rooms, staring right at me and smiling before looking at my wrist.

Creepy.

But I continue to walk toward wherever the lady is taking me. Why do they keep looking at my wrist? Why are they smiling at me strangely?

“How long do you think it will take for you to get her?” I ask as she leads me into a room. “I have somewhere I need to be in an hour. People are expecting.”

Lies, but I’m not going to let her know that. The uneasy feeling still hasn’t left, and I need her to know that people will be looking for me. Who? I don’t know. Matthias definitely will when he realizes that I’ve gone. Maybe he’ll get worried and rescue me from this place if I need it.

But that’s if I need it.

This place could just be sketchy and nothing happens. Maybe I’m just working myself up about something that isn’t going to be a problem.

Taking a deep breath, I look at the girl as I stand at the door.

“So, how long do you think it will be?” I ask. “I just need to make sure that I tell people I’ll be late if it’s going to take longer than expected.”

I grab my phone out of my bag and turn it on. Who would I text to make it seem like I’m messaging someone? If they have Margery’s phone, I can’t text her. The only other people I have in my phone are Matthias and my boss. I can’t text my boss, and I’m definitely not texting Matthias.

I take a step into the room and sit in the chair.

“It will only take a couple of minutes for us to get him,” she replies, walking to the door.

“Him?” My eyebrows furrow. “Margery isn’t a guy.”

“Oh, sorry. I didn’t mean him, I meant her . We’ll get her and bring her to you. You

just sit tight in here.” She smiles and walks out of the room, shutting the door behind her and locking it.

Wait.

Locking it?

I suck in a breath as I stare at the door. There must be a really good reason for locking it. Maybe some patients don’t like an unlocked door, or they are trying to keep me safe? I don’t know.

Wrapping my arms around myself, I slowly let out the breath to try and calm myself. Everything is going to be okay. I don’t have anything to worry about because they are going to come with Margery in a couple of minutes, and everything is going to be fine.

But as the minutes pass, and they still haven’t come with Margery, my pulse picks up. Shit. What have I gotten myself into? I shouldn’t have come here alone. I shouldn’t have told Margery to come here. What was I thinking?

Turning my phone on, I pull up Matthias’ name. Should I call him and ask him to come get me? I shouldn’t be contacting him, but he is the only person I know who can get me out of here. I press his name, but it immediately ends the call.

“What?” I whisper to myself.

Looking at the top right corner, I curse when I realize I don’t have any reception in here. How am I going to get in contact with him?

I jump out of my chair and walk to the door, banging on it, and hoping someone hears.

“Hello! Anyone there?” I cry out. “I really do need to go. I have people waiting for me.”

Silence.

I try the door handle, hoping and praying my mind was playing tricks on me when I heard it lock. The door doesn’t budge, and my heart sinks.

I’m locked in here with no reception to call anyone for help.

Am I going to be stuck in here for the rest of my life? What have I done?

I walk over to the side of the room and lean against the wall, sliding down until I’m sitting with my eyes fixed on the door.

This isn’t good. How could I have been so foolish to think that everything was going to be all right?

Why couldn’t I have listened to my gut and not walked into the place?

I should have messaged Matthias or someone else about me coming in here, so they would have known.

Now no one knows.

“Shit,” I whisper, tears pooling in my eyes. “How could I be so dumb?”

Pulling my legs up to my chest, I lean my head on my knees. Everything is going to be okay. They are going to bring Margery to me, and then I’m going to leave.

I’ll have to figure out how to get Margery out of here. Maybe I can strike a deal with

Matthias to help me get her out of here. That is, if she is actually here and if I get out.

Matthias has to be looking for me. If he is this obsessed with me and wants me as his, he won't let me disappear for several hours without trying to find me. At least I have that on my side.

Keys jingle, but I don't get up. I don't want to get my hopes up right now, not when I am on the brink of breaking down. Maybe that's what they want. They want me to break so they can say they have to keep me in here.

No, I'm not going to do that.

But as the door opens, my eyes go wide as I stare at the figure in front of me.

"Little bit," he says with a smile.

MATTHIAS

“That went better than expected,” I sit in my chair and relax.

Rogan wasn't there to disrupt anything, and everything went according to plan. Smooth and flawless.

“We are getting better at it.” Ethan lowers to the seat beside me. “Let's just hope we can keep it that way.”

I chuckle. “You know this next step isn't going to be easy.”

It never is and it never will be. These girls are absolutely petrified, and having big men around them doesn't help, but they will understand eventually. Most of them come around fairly quickly since we have some older girls who have stayed to help with the transition.

Ethan groans. “Don't remind me. It's been a couple of days, and I have yet to hear anything from Jason.”

“I've already texted him to come up and give us a report. I figured you would want to hear from him,” I tell him.

He smiles. “You know me too well.”

“You insult me by thinking that I don't.”

We fall into silence for a few moments before Ren and Jason walk into the room.

“Have the girls given you any trouble?” Ethan inquires.

I look at Jason, studying his face to see if he is going to tell us the truth. Ethan trusts him and has known him for years, but this is unlike Jason to wait several days to give a report about the girls. This time is critical, which he knows.

“Just the usual couple of girls who haven’t been in long. They’ll soon figure out they don’t need to act out,” he replies.

“And you couldn’t have come to me with that information yesterday?” Ethan asks.

“Yeah, Jason. Tell him why you couldn’t have come yesterday or the day before,” Ren chuckles.

I look between the two. What has been going on? Why is Ren laughing and pushing Jason to the wolf?

Jason glares at Ren before turning to Ethan. “I got carried away.”

I whistle. Oh, that is not going to fly with Ethan. Ethan likes to know everything that is going on with his operations. He likes to be in the know and be in control of everything.

“Doing what exactly?” Ethan asks.

Jason’s cheeks go red. “With one of the women who came in the shipment.”

My eyebrows lift as I look at him. He has taken an interest in one of them women?

“How?”

“She knew my sister, and we hit it off. We talked about my sister,” Jason says quietly.

“That’s not the only thing you talked about,” Ren chimes in.

“You were there?” Ethan asks.

“Not the whole time, but toward the end, I was. Our boy has found somebody he is interested in. The girl is interested in him. Pretty, too. If she doesn’t go for him, I might go for her,” Ren teases.

“Don’t fucking talk about her like that! She’s a human being! Show her some respect! Over my dead body are you getting with her!” Jason roars.

Ethan whistles and shakes his head. Jason is definitely more interested in this girl than he is letting on. By that reaction, he is really interested in her.

“See, he likes her.” Ren shrugs and laughs.

“Have you put her in a different room to the others?” Ethan asks.

Silence fills the room as we all think about what happened years ago. Poor Bellamy.

“Not yet. I haven’t asked her whether she would like that,” Jason replies.

“I know I can’t stop you, and I’m not going to. But just be careful. We don’t know how long she has been trafficked. Just be careful,” Ethan tells him.

I hope Jason knows what he is doing. I don’t want him to go through the same thing

Bellamy did all those years ago. He hasn't been the same since, and I don't think he's ever going to be okay.

"I know. You don't have to preach to me. I was there when Bellamy found her body." Jason waves his hand in the air. "I'm going to check in with her daily because I don't want that to happen."

I hope it doesn't for his sake. We don't need him retreating into himself.

I still can't stop thinking about Jason finding his girl. We don't know how long she was trafficked for and how much mental damage has been done.

For Jason's sake, I hope she wants to live badly enough.

My phone buzzes, pulling me from my thoughts. I groan and pull it out of my pocket.

"Why is the facility calling me?" I mumble to myself.

"The facility?" Ethan asks, his eyebrows pulling together. "We don't have anyone in there right now."

We use a facility to get information out of people every once in a while. It's easy, and all our equipment is there. We haven't used it in a while, but we still make monthly donations, so they don't talk, and so we have access to it at any point.

"This better be good," I growl into the phone when I pick it up.

"Go teach them a lesson. The owner is getting to be a prick and demanding more money to keep his mouth shut," Ethan tells me. "If he is, make it known that we can and will kill him at any point and take over. We're doing him a favor by paying him when we don't need to."

I grunt. Ain't that the truth. I was skeptical in the beginning when Ethan wanted to pay him instead of just killing him and taking over. The owner isn't innocent, and we would be doing New York City a service by taking him out.

"Is this Matthias?" a female voice asks.

"You know it is. Now what the fuck do you want?" I growl once again, my patience wearing thin.

"We have a woman in a room here," she starts off. "She is blonde and fairly tall."

"What's her name?" I ask. "I don't know any woman who is there. We didn't send anyone."

"Y-you didn't?"

I close my eyes and take a deep breath. I am supposed to be leaving soon to get to Adalisa. I have a whole night planned with her, and this phone call is ruining it.

It seems like every single time I want to leave to be with Adalisa, something comes up. It's like the universe knows how badly I want her and is making it harder for me to actually get her.

Adalisa is mine.

I will do everything in my power to get her one way or the other. No one is going to keep me from her.

"Do they want more money?" Ethan asks, leaning back in his chair.

I shake my head and pull the phone away from my ear. "No, they have a girl there.

Blonde, tall.”

Why are they calling me about some girl?

Every person we send there, we personally deliver.

No one walks in that we are going to hurt, and we very rarely obtain information from girls.

Not unless they are a criminal who has done something grave.

But even then, most of them will talk before we even touch them.

“Isn’t your girl blonde and tall?” Ethan looks at me.

I narrow my eyes on him. “Yes, but she wouldn’t be there. She has no reason to be there.”

“She did tell Margery to visit if she was still having hallucinations,” Ethan says. “Though they weren’t hallucinations, but your girl doesn’t know that, does she?”

Turning away from Ethan, I pull the phone back to my ear. “What is her name?”

“She was wearing a silver bracelet. The one you told us to watch out for,” the girl says.

It can’t be Adalisa. Ethan and I have given several people silver bracelets. It could be anyone.

“What is her fucking name?” I growl. “I won’t ask again.”

Silence fills the room as I wait for her to answer. How do they not know the girl's name? Why don't they know her name?

Because we told everyone with those bracelets to get them somewhere safe and ask questions later. They are just doing their jobs, but when it comes to Adalisa, they need to do a better job.

"Adalisa," the girl finally whispers, and the blood drains from my face.

No fucking way.

"Shit. Keep her there and don't you dare fucking touch her. I will be there to collect her soon," I growl into the phone before hanging up.

What is Adalisa doing there? Why did she think it was okay to go into a facility like that and get caught?

"So, I'm taking it your girl is there?" Ethan chuckles. "You are going to have your hands full with that one."

"No joke," I mumble. "But I wouldn't have it any other way."

Adalisa is mine, handful or not. And I wouldn't trade her for the world. She is precious.

"Are you going to go get her?" Ethan asks. "Or are you going to let her sit in for a while?"

It briefly crossed my mind to let her wait for a couple of hours so she would learn her lesson, but the sooner I get to her, the sooner I get to be near her. "If you need anything, find someone else before asking me," I say as I rush out the door.

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Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 1:40 pm

ADALISA

I stare at Matthias in shock. How does he know I'm here? How did he figure out where I was so quickly?

"I thought you said you didn't do anything to her." Matthias looks behind him angrily. "I told you not to do anything to her."

My eyebrows pinch together. What does he mean? He knew I was here the whole time? How is that possible?

"We did nothing but place her in the room," the receptionist answers.

"You locked me in a room!" I raise my voice, but don't get up from the floor.

Is Matthias going to get me out of here? Is he going to rescue me, or is he going to leave me here for hours?

I suck in a breath at the thought. I won't be able to survive being in here any longer. No, I will go absolutely mad if he leaves me in here. But maybe that's what he wants. Maybe Matthias wants me to go mad so that when he comes to finally collect me, I'll do whatever he says.

"You did nothing to her?" Matthias repeats.

"We only placed her in this room. She asked about Margery, and then I saw the bracelet. You said to get anyone with the bracelet to a room and call you," the

receptionist replies.

“No,” he growls. “We did not say that. We said silver bracelets should not be placed in rooms. The only people to be placed in a room are people we bring in here.”

I look between Matthias and the receptionist. What is going on here?

“Bu-bu?—”

“No. From now on follow the fucking rules we gave,” Matthias glares at her before walking toward me.

I push myself up against the wall and stare at him. What is his plan now? He kneels in front of me, searching my body. Is he making sure they are telling the truth and didn't do anything to me? Part of me wishes now they had so I could see him go off on them.

Matthias cups my face. “What did you think you were doing?” he asks, his face full of worry and rage. “What did you think you were doing by coming here?”

I open my mouth to tell him why I was there, but he stops me.

“No, don't say anything. I don't want to hear it right now,” he sighs. “We are going home, and then we will have a discussion about it.”

He grabs my hand, leading me out of the room and down the hall. I don't dare look up at the staff, not wanting to see the smug looks on their face.

Home? We are going home? To his house or mine? I want to ask him, but I keep quiet. He is furious, and I don't want to be on the receiving end of it. Matthias told me he doesn't hurt innocent people, but what is his definition of innocent?

I have done nothing wrong, but he could think that I have and try to hurt me.

Matthias marches me out of the building and straight toward his car, helping me in. Before I can even reach for my seatbelt, he has it fastened around me.

I messed up.

But how was I supposed to know going there would end up like this? How was I supposed to know when he hasn't told me anything? I haven't given him time to tell me anything, so it is partly my fault. I don't want anything to do with him, and I've been trying my hardest to avoid him.

"What the fuck do you think you were doing there?" he asks, his voice is calm, but I can hear a hint of anger in it. "What were you doing there?"

"Looking for my friend," I quietly reply, not wanting to anger him any more than he already is. "I recommended the place to her when I found it online."

What was I thinking?

And I still haven't found Margery.

"Your friend isn't there. She is safe." Matthias white-knuckles the steering wheel.

I turn in my seat, my mouth hanging open as I look at him. "You know my friend?"

"Yes, I do. She is safe," is all he says.

"No, you don't get to tell me that you know my friend and she's safe. I've been worried sick about her! I need to know where she is. I need to see her with my own eyes," I demand.

I haven't been a good friend to Margery. Letting her go on a vacation alone. Letting her think that her dead ex-boyfriend was stalking her. I should have sat with her and asked her if everything was all right. I should have been there for her, but I wasn't.

I wasn't there for her when she needed me.

"You don't get to stipulate things." Matthias pins me with a glare. "You are not in charge here. I am. You won't see her right now."

"You can't do that!" I raise my voice. "I am my own person. I am responsible for myself and her. You cannot tell me that."

Matthias doesn't reply, and I continue to look at him. Maybe if I stare enough, he will get annoyed and finally answer.

"You will not see her today or tomorrow, and I won't change my answer." Matthias pulls up to a house. "Now, we are going to go inside and have a chat before you are punished."

"Punished?!" I gulp.

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 1:40 pm

ADALISA

I 'm sitting on the bed in Matthias' guest room as he sits in front of me on an overstuffed chair. I don't know how I got here. One second ago, I was in the car.

What does he mean by "punished?" Matthias is delusional if he thinks he can punish me. No one punishes me. Not him. Not my parents. And not anyone.

"You can't hurt me," I announce after several seconds of thinking.

I hate the silence, and I think Matthias knows that. We've been staring at each other for a few minutes. It feels like hours, but I know it hasn't been hours as it's still light outside.

"I can and I will," he replies.

"Who gives you the authority to punish me?"

"I gave myself authority because you know you need it. Do not try to deny it, " he points out. "And as for who says you need punishing, that would be me."

"Why?" I shout, throwing my hands in the air.

He stares at me while I wait for him to answer. I have fantasized about someone taking me over their knee several times, but I've never been brave enough to ask anyone for it. Who would I ask anyway?

Matthias leans forward, gripping my chin with his fingers once again. I hate it when he does this.

“Why?” he slowly repeats my question. “Because you put yourself in danger. You walked into that facility looking for your friend and didn’t even think about your own safety.”

“H-how?—”

“How do I know? I know you, Adalisa. I know that you are trying to find Margery and you will do anything to find her,” he tells me. “I know that you will put your own safety on the back burner that is unacceptable.”

“I need to find her,” I whisper. “She is all I have left.”

“And now you know she is safe. When I am allowed to take you to her, I will, but right now you can’t see her.”

What does he mean when he is allowed to take me to her ?

“What you need to know is that putting yourself in danger is not okay. It will never be okay. If you think something is going to be dangerous, then you will contact me and I will decide what to do,” Matthias informs me. “When you walked up to the facility, did you feel okay about the situation?”

I keep my face neutral. He can’t know I had a bad feeling before, can he? I didn’t give anything away.

“Did you?” he asks again. “And do not think about lying to me. It will only add to your punishment.”

Sighing, I nod. “Yes,” I whisper.

“And yet you still decided to go in. At least you had the bracelet on.”

I wince at the mention of the bracelet. It’s almost like they singled me out because I had the bracelet on. It was like they took one look at my bracelet and heard me say Margery’s name, and that was it. There were no more arguments or hearing me out.

What if they hadn’t called Matthias?

“You need to be more careful,” Matthias says. “You can’t go walking into places you don’t know. That is dangerous, especially when you don’t know anything about the operations going on in there.”

“I know,” I mumble.

I have learned my lesson. Don’t walk into strange places.

Margery needs me.

“What you did was naughty, putting yourself into danger. So after a spanking all will be forgiven,” Matthias gently explains.

I stand and shake my head. “Yeah, no. I definitely don’t need a spanking.”

He raises an eyebrow, and it takes everything in me not to sit back down.

“Are you sure about that?” he asks. “I think, deep down, you know you need a spanking, but you don’t want to admit it.

You don’t want to say the words aloud because it becomes real.

But I think you do want this, and you've wanted it for a while. ”

“No.” My voice wavers, and I curse myself inside my head.

He caught me there. I do want a spanking, and I have for a while.

To feel the love and care that someone is looking out for you and holding you accountable?

It's been a dream of mine. Not the whole spanking and pain aspect of it, though.

I don't want that, but I want to feel like someone actually cares for me and wants what is best for me.

Matthias smiles as he looks at me. “Lies.”

I shake my head. Partial lies, but he doesn't need to know that.

“That will get you into more trouble. It will add to your tally,” Matthias informs me.

I bite the inside of my cheek, not believing him. ? I've never heard of that before in the books I've read.

Matthias grabs hold of my chin, and I clench my jaw. What is his obsession with holding my chin?

“It makes you focus on me,” he tells me.

“Did I say that out loud?” I groan.

I need to get that under control. “I like it when you speak your mind,” Matthias

honestly says. “It helps me know what you are really thinking. Don’t ever stop.”

That’s easy for him to say. He gets to hear all of my thoughts, but he isn’t the one actually saying it.

“I’m going to spank you and then you can have all the cuddles you want.” Matthias keeps hold of my chin.

It’s his favorite thing to do to me. Grab my chin and make sure I am looking at him as he talks. It makes me so mad every single time he does it because I have to pay attention to him even when I don’t want to.

“Take off your pants and underwear and then climb over my lap,” he instructs me.

“I’m not taking anything off.” I cross my arms over my chest and pull my chin out of his grip.

I am not about to be half-naked in front of him while he spanks me. No way.

“I don’t spank clothed bottoms,” Matthias says firmly, lifting an eyebrow.

“I don’t get spanked while naked.”

I don’t get spanked, period.

“Not even when you want it to be a fun spanking?” He tilts his head to the side. “So sad. I thought about giving your nice ass a love tap next time we have sex.”

My face grows bright red as he continues to talk. I love it when guys spank my ass as they fuck me, but I haven’t had it happen in a while. It’s completely different to what he is talking about right now.

“I didn’t say I didn’t like it for fun, but this spanking isn’t going to be something I’m going to enjoy,” I point out.

“Punishment spankings aren’t fun, but they happen in the nude. You will not get around that.” Matthias’ voice is firm. “So, get out of your pants and underwear and lie over my lap.”

I stand still as I look at him. I’m not going to do that. He can’t make me.

“One.” Matthias looks calm. “Two.”

My hands scramble as I yank my pants and panties down and throw myself across his lap. Heaving in a breath, I try to calm my pulse but don’t succeed when his hand touches my bottom.

“Shh, you’re okay,” he whispers as he starts to rub my bottom. “Everything is going to be all right.”

I snort. “You’re about to spank me. Everything is not going to be all right. My bottom is going to be on fire soon.”

His body moves underneath me before I can hear the sweet sound of his chuckle. “True, but after the spanking you are going to be all right. You are going to thank me for spanking you and giving you the release you need. Getting rid of all the guilt.”

“I don’t know about that,” I mutter. “I don’t feel any guilt.”

More lies. I feel a little guilty, but that’s for failing Margery.

Matthias’ hand stills on my bottom. “You don’t feel any guilt about putting yourself in danger and getting caught up in a situation that could have been really dangerous?”

Okay, when he puts it like that, I do. Was he worried about me when he got the call? Should I have been more conscious about what I was about to do? Yes, I should have been, but how was I supposed to know that was going to go?

“I think you do, but you don’t want to admit it.

I think deep down, you are feeling the guilt of putting yourself in danger and causing me to worry when I got the call.

” Matthias starts to rub my bottom. “That’s okay, though, because this punishment is going to help get rid of all of it.

After this spanking, all is forgiven, and the slate is clean. ”

“Really?” I find myself asking.

“Yes, really. After this, I am going to hold you as you cry. Then we are going to snuggle as much as you want.” His voice is so tender and loving.

I still am not used to him sounding like that, but I am not mad about it either. It’s a side of him I don’t think a lot of people see, and I’m honored that I get to. Wait. I should not be thinking he is sweet. He wants to claim me.

He has stalked me. I should be trying to get away from him, yet I keep finding myself actively thinking about staying with him and being close to him.

What is wrong with me?

“Are you ready?” Matthias asks.

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Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 1:40 pm

ADALISA

“ I don’t think anyone is ever ready for a spanking.” I turn my head and try to look at him, but I can’t.

Without warning, Matthias’ hand comes down on my bottom, making me cry out in shock and pain. Mainly shock.

“You’re okay,” he says as he rubs my bottom.

I suck in a breath and tense, waiting for him to spank me again, but it never comes.

“Ha—” I start to say as Matthias peppers my bottom with more swats.

Yelling, I attempt to wiggle on his lap, trying to get away from his hand raining down on my bottom.

“No!” I yell, kicking my feet.

“You can wiggle all you want, but you are getting this,” Matthias says as he continues to spank me.

Tears form in my eyes as he moves to my sit spot. Pain radiates across my bottom as he lands several more.

“Please!” I beg. “Please!”

“I know. We’re almost done.” He rubs my bottom for a second.

But I know better than to relax in his lap. He isn’t done yet.

“How much more?” I whine, trying to roll off his lap, but his arm pins me in place.

“Almost done,” he says. “These last couple are going to be harder and faster.”

I open my mouth, ready to tell him no, but shriek when he starts spanking me again. And true to his word, they were harder and faster than the ones before. Tears stream down my face as he continues.

“Pl-please!” I cry, not wanting any more.

“Soon,” is all he says.

I sob as he lands several on my sit spot. My body goes limp as he spans me a couple more times. Matthias maneuvers me, pulling me to sit on his lap. Tears are streaming down my face as he holds me against his chest, hands running up and down my back while he rocks us from side to side.

I should be trying to get as far away as possible from him, but I need this cuddle.

I need to feel his arms wrapped around me and him telling me everything is okay.

I need to feel protected and loved. But I shouldn’t want that with him.

Not when he isn’t a good person at all. I need to stay away from him, but I can do that after we snuggle a little longer.

“Shhh, you’re okay. You took that punishment really well. All is forgiven now,” he

whispers into my ear. “I know it was a shock, but I needed to show you that I’m not all talk.”

There goes my plan of leaving and him not doing anything. My shoulders sag in his embrace, and I can’t help but let the tears fall a little harder with those words. He will follow through with punishments, which means if he wants me badly enough, he is going to find me.

I have to try to get away from him so I can save myself because if he somehow sinks his claws into me, then I don’t know how my life is going to turn out.

“You’re okay,” he gently soothes. “I’m here. Just let it all out, and Daddy will catch your tears.”

Calling him Daddy is on the tip of my tongue.

I so badly want to call him that, but I stop myself.

If I start doing that, I won’t be able to stop myself from doing anything else with him.

I need to have some f self-control. “Such a good girl for taking your punishment so well,” he praises.

“You were so brave, and I’m so proud of you. ”

He was proud of me for taking a punishment? Is he crazy?

I want to ask, but I don’t want him to explain and keep me here longer. I need to leave as soon as possible so I can get out of New York City.

Whenever Matthias is close to me, I can’t seem to think about things properly.

Matthias would probably tell me there is nothing wrong with my mind constantly being on him, but I beg to differ. I need to stay away from him and get a plan in order to execute it perfectly.

“Let’s go fill your tummy with some food and then go to bed.” Matthias stands with me in his arms.

“I need to go home,” I tell him, holding my breath as I wait for his answer.

Is he going to be mad at me for wanting to go home? Nerves run through my body, making me nauseous as I wait for his answer. Why is he waiting so long? I know Matthias would never physically hurt me.

“Why?” he finally asks. “Why do you need to go home?”

“I have things to do,” I whisper. “I have to get ready for work tomorrow. I need to write a report on why I closed early and come up with an excuse that my boss will believe. She may not care, but she want to know why.”

My boss is the least of my worries. She wouldn’t care at all if I didn’t give her a reason, but Matthias can’t know that, or else he isn’t going to let me go home.

“I need to get some sleep. I’m exhausted and a lot has happened in the past twelve hours,” I honestly reply.

What I wouldn’t do to sleep with his arms around me for the whole night and possibly have him bring me pleasure as he wakes me up.

To feel safe and secure all night long. That would be the dream, but I’m not going to voice it.

If he knows that's what I want, he is never going to let me go.

If I spend the night here and then manage to get away from him, I don't know if I'll be able to sleep peacefully again.

I sigh. "I just need to wrap my brain around everything. I need to think things through, and I can't do that around you." My voice breaks when he doesn't speak. I need to fill this silence. "I just need some time to myself so I can think about everything. You aren't making thinking easy."

It feels good to get that off my chest. Let Matthias know that I'm trying to deal with everything. Does he think it doesn't affect me at all?

"I don't like it," he mumbles, his hold on me tightening a little.

"I don't like being held hostage either," I retort. "One of us is going to have to give in and it's not me."

I feel like Matthias wouldn't let anyone else get away with talking to him like that. But he needs to know he can't just walk all over me. I won't allow it.

I pull away from him so I can see his face. It's blank, no emotions at all, and I'm annoyed.

"I'm not giving up. I need time to think," I insist. "I need time to do the things I need to do some life admin. I can't spend the night."

I'm starting to worry that he is catching on to what I'm trying to do.

No.

I need to believe that he doesn't unless he tells me. Maybe I'm just that good at keeping it a secret, and he doesn't suspect anything.

"Life admin? What in your life needs to get done?" he asks, cocking his head to the side.

I suck in a breath. What do I say?

"Well, Margery is one. She is part of my life, and I need to figure out where she is and if she is okay," I tell him.

"Second, I'm thinking about changing jobs.

Third, I have a lot of laundry that needs to get done, or else my apartment is going to start smelling, which I don't want.

Do you want me to continue because I have other things on my to-do list? "

"Please, do." He smiles.

"I need to go grocery shopping and cook. I don't enjoy take-out food much, and if I don't go grocery shopping tonight, I won't have anything to eat.

I need to fix my leaky faucet and clean my bathroom," I go on, making things up.

"I have a schedule, and I stick to it. You are not going to interrupt my schedule."

"Your schedule?" Matthias raises an eyebrow. "I don't remember you having a schedule when I was watching you."

Shit. Shit. Shit.

Abort. Abort. Abort.

I've backed myself into a corner here.

"Well, it's been in the past month. I don't know how you've missed it, but it's there. Someone told me that I need to stick to a schedule if I want to improve my life. That I may thrive off a schedule so I am trying it but they say you can't deviate from it or else you have to restart," I ramble.

Matthias hums and looks at me. Does he believe me? I need him to so I can get out of here and start my plan.

"Let me feed you first, and then I will drop you off at home myself," Matthias finally offers as he gently places me on the kitchen counter. I hiss and lean forward, trying to alleviate the pain. "Stay where I put you. If you try to get off or move, I will give you a timeout or another spanking."

"I don't want to sit on my bottom right now," I tell him. "I am perfectly capable of standing and staying in one spot."

He pins me with a look. "You will not stand. This will remind you not to put yourself into danger. Feel the consequences of your actions."

I cross my arms over my chest and pout. Will I actually learn from this? Probably not. When it comes to Margery needing my help, my own safety will go out the window.

"Now, do you want a grilled cheese sandwich? Buttered toast? Some chocolate milk? I have a strawberry if you prefer that," Matthias lists. "I can make you a turkey sandwich."

"I'm not hungry," I mutter as my stomach grumbles. Groaning, I close my eyes and

wrap my arms around my stomach.

“You are going to eat, even if I have to feed you myself,” Matthias states.

My cheeks redden at the image of him feeding me. I’ve never had someone feed me since being a child. Someone taking care of me and us both enjoying every second of it.

“I’m really fine. I just need to get home so I can do things,” I whisper, not looking at him.

“I think you want someone to feed you. I think you want it, but you don’t want to ask for it,” Matthias suggests.

He pushes my legs apart and stands between them, getting closer to me. I suck in a breath as he pulls me forward, my core hitting groin.

Don’t think about it. Do not think about it.

“Adalisa, look at me,” Mathias firmly says.

But I don’t dare. Not when we are so close, and I know I won’t be able to say anything but the truth if he asks me. No, I can’t do this.

“Now,” he commands.

My head lifts, but before I can meet his gaze, I close my eyes. Matthias sighs and cups my face.

“Open those pretty eyes of yours. Come on. You aren’t in any trouble. I just want to talk,” he coos.

I don't fall for it, though. I can't. He wants to talk, which means he will do the talking, and I will somehow agree to it all.

"Adalisa, everything is going to be okay," he whispers. "Nothing bad is going to happen."

I feel like his definition of nothing bad is way different from mine.

Matthias rubs his thumb across my cheek. "I guess I'm going to keep you here all night, then. Open your eyes, and we can talk about things."

I open my eyes and stare at him. I cannot stay with him all night.

"There she is." He smiles sweetly. "Let's talk about what you're keeping from me."

ADALISA

My eyes go wide. Does he know what I've been planning in my head? I haven't told anyone.

"Wh-what?" I whisper.

"We're going to talk about what you are keeping from me," he repeats, like he didn't stutter the first time.

"I ca-can explain!" I rush out.

Maybe if I tell him before he can say anything, he won't be as upset. Maybe if I give him my reasoning, he'll see what I'm going through and take pity on me.

"I didn't mean it!" I whisper-shout. "I really didn't mean it!"

"Wow, Little bit. Take a deep breath. There is no reason for you to get worked up about it," he gently says, keeping a firm touch on my face. "We can work through it. I know you don't like to eat things you haven't prepared yourself."

I blink several times as his words register. He isn't talking about me wanting to escape. So that means he doesn't know about my plan.

"I wish you had told me." He tilts his head to the right side a little. "I wish I had realized it sooner."

I open and close my mouth several times, not knowing what to say. I was sure he was going to be mad at me for trying to escape. I thought he was on to me, but he wasn't, and now I don't know what to do. My brain is trying hard to catch up, but it's like it's short-circuited.

“Adalisa.” His voice is smooth and low. “Come back to me.”

“Hmm?” I look into his eyes.

“There you are,” he whispers. “What were you just thinking?”

“I don't know.” Tears form in my eyes. “Everything is a big, jumbled mess in my mind right now.”

He holds my face, his thumb rubbing my cheek every couple of minutes. “Just take a deep breath in, hold it, and slowly let it out. Good girl. Let's do it one more time. Deep breath in. Hold it. Now, slowly let it out. Such a good girl for me. Do you feel better?”

I nod and lean into his hand. It should be a crime to make me feel this good with a simple touch. It should be illegal.

“Now, why you didn't tell me you didn't like to eat food that you haven't prepared?” he asks.

How does he know?

“I've been watching you. I know things about you,” he whispers. “Did you eat the food I had delivered that my ma made?”

I look away from him. The food smelled so good, but I didn't eat it. I wanted to so

badly, but after his mother sided with him and told me not to fight and just give in, I knew I couldn't. What if she had put something in it? I wasn't going to take a chance on that.

"Adalisa, it's all right. I'm not going to get angry with you," Matthias gently says. "If anything, I should be saying sorry to you. I had no idea you didn't like to eat food you hadn't prepared yourself."

No one does. Even Margery doesn't know it. I've kept it from her for years, and I want to keep it that way. There are only a select few people who I trust enough to eat from without thinking, and most of them are dead now.

"Come on, Addy. You're okay. You can speak freely," Matthias encourages me.

"I didn't eat it." I look away briefly. "I couldn't, no matter how good it smelled."

"Can you eat it if you watch someone preparing it?" Matthias asks.

I've never tried it, and I really don't want to. To know that I could blink and he could put something in it. Or he could change some seasoning to something I haven't tried before.

"I don't think so," I whisper, shuddering at all the.

"Where did this come from?" Matthias rubs his thumb across my cheek as we stare into each other's eyes.

I yank my head out of his touch and shake my head. I can't talk about this.

"Adalisa, you're safe here," he whispers. "I will keep you safe."

“No,” I force out.

“What happened to make you this anxious about food?” He keeps asking questions.

Tears prick my eyes as I stare at him. I don’t want to talk about this. I don’t want to relive it.

“You’re okay.” Matthias pulls me into his embrace. “But we’re going to work through this.”

I shake my head against his chest. What if I don’t want to work through this?

“Can you tell me if this has always been a thing or if something happened to cause it?” Matthias is persistent.

I suck in a deep breath and whisper, “Something happened.”

I grab his shirt and hold on tight. I really don’t want to be talking about this, but the words just tumble out of my mouth. It’s like my brain and body know that Matthias is safe.

“Good girl,” he praises. “Good girl for answering my question. I’m so proud of you. If you want to tell me more, you can, but you don’t have to.”

I clench my jaw and close my eyes tightly. I don’t want to talk about it, but once I open my mouth, it’s all over.

“Someone used to put metal shavings into my food, almost like a powder, so I didn’t know and couldn’t tell anyone.

It went on for a while until I started to get sick.

” My voice trembles as I talk. “I didn’t know why I was getting sick, and they didn’t want me to go to the doctors.

Said I had just gotten a cold, but I had a feeling it wasn’t just that. ”

“Adalisa.” His one word holds so much sadness.

“I didn’t know what to do. I was so young, but I had a gut feeling that I wasn’t getting better.

So one day, when they were gone, I went to the next door neighbors and asked them if they could take me to the hospital,” I explain.

Everything flashes in front of my eyes like it happened yesterday.

“They didn’t need any convincing from my appearance. I looked almost dead.”

I take a deep breath and hold onto Matthias. Why did I have to open my mouth? Why couldn’t I have been persistent and said I wasn’t going to talk about it? Why couldn’t I have been strong?

I haven’t ever talked about this since it happened. I asked the neighbor, they stayed with me, and then the police. That was it. No one else knows, and I planned to keep it that way.

“What happened next?” Matthias asks, running his hand through my hair.

“They ran a lot of tests on me and found out what was wrong. I don’t remember everything, but the police showed up and asked me a lot of questions. They arrested the perpetrator. I believe they are still in prison...” My words trail off.

I haven't checked in a long time to see if they are still in prison. I am an adult now, and they can't do anything to me. They are no longer part of my life.

"And after that?" Matthias presses.

"I was in and out of the hospital for a while. I wouldn't eat or drink anything because that's how they put poisoned me. I didn't want to eat or drink because I was scared it was going to happen again." I shiver in his arms.

Matthias holds me tighter against him and I heave in a deep breath. Recovery was awful for me. I lost so much weight, weight I couldn't afford to lose but I had.

"They admitted me into hospital once and put a feeding tube down my throat. If I wasn't going to eat, they were going to force feed me so I didn't wither away," I whisper.

"It took me a while to finally be able to eat again. It took a lot of talking to a specialist. When I realized if I bought food and cooked everything myself, I was better. But only because I lived alone and knew no one else could tamper with anything."

Margery has never been in my apartment. I know she wouldn't do anything to my food, but any time she wants to hang out, we always go to her house. Now Matthias has been in my apartment and I don't know how many times.

Has he tampered with my spices? There is no way for me to know if he has, and I don't know if I would trust his word on it.

I would trust him if he told me he hadn't messed with anything and that's what scares me. I shouldn't trust Matthias.. But I do.

“And you haven’t tried letting anyone cook while you watch? Not even if everything is unopened?” Matthias inquires.

“No, and I don’t know if I should or would,” I reply honestly.

That is a level of trust I don’t have with anyone. I don’t think I’ll have it with anyone, which I’ve come to accept. It makes my life so much simpler. I don’t have to constantly think or worry if they have done anything.

“One day we are going to try it. When you are ready, but we will,” Matthias confidently says. “We will go grocery shopping and you can touch everything in the store. You will keep an eye on it all and you can watch as I cook it all for you at my house.”

Matthias pulls back and looks at me. He looks deadly serious when we make eye contact and I know he is telling the truth. There is no way he is bluffing on this.

“But it won’t be today. I know you aren’t ready for that,” he says before kissing my forehead. “I have an important question now, and I need you to answer me honestly. Can you do that?”

“Yes?” I reply hesitantly.

“Who did this to you?”

MATTHIAS

Adalisa shakes her head, and I grit my teeth. I am going to find out.

“Adalisa,” I growl.

“No.” She shakes her head again. “He is gone. He is out of my life. He’s in prison or he’s dead. Either way, he is out of my life.”

He.

The person who poisoned her is a male. That narrows it down a little, but not by a lot.

“I will know eventually. I want you to tell me who poisoned you,” I demand.

“And what are you going to do when you find out? He’s in prison. He is living in a cell and I’m perfectly fine with that,” she replies.

“I’m not.”

Her eyebrows shoot up as she looks at me in surprise. I’m not okay with knowing the person who almost killed Adalisa, my love, is alive. He should be six feet under. He should be tortured and go through an agonizing death for putting Adalisa through that torrid ordeal.

He needs to suffer.

By my hands or someone in prison, I do not care, but he will suffer. All I need to do is find him.

“I’m not telling you. You don’t need to do anything,” Adalisa finally huffs.

“I don’t need to, but I want to and I’m going to,” I tell her. “You can tell me, or I will find out. Either way, something is happening.”

I’ll have to tell Ethan what I’m planning in case something comes back on us. I don’t plan on anything happening to us or our loved ones, but you can never be too careful.

Adalisa opens and closes her mouth several times.

“You can think about it and give me his name when you are ready, but just know I will be looking into it. I will find out with or without you,” I confirm. “If you don’t want to know anything, that’s fine, but if you do then I can tell you what will happen when I find him.”

She stares at me, and I know I’ve just unloaded a heap of information on her. Probably wasn’t the best idea after she told me everything, but I need her to know that there will be repercussions to him.

I can’t help but feel the rage inside of me as I think of him poisoning her. Unacceptable.

“You can’t do anything,” she whispers.

“And why not?” I place both of my hands on the counter on either side of her, boxing her in. “Why can’t I do anything?”

“Be-cause he is in prison and you are here. You can’t go into the prison and kill

him. You'll end up in prison, too. You don't need to do anything because he is already suffering for what he did to me," she explains.

"He hasn't suffered enough," I tell her matter-of-factly. "I want him to suffer even more than he already has. I need him to suffer more and know that what he did to you is unacceptable."

It is about taking care of Adalisa, but it's also setting an example. Not everyone will be afraid, but maybe it will discourage a couple of people who were thinking about trying something so heinous.

"I don't." She pauses. "I don't know what to say."

"Then don't say anything. I will take care of it all. You just need to tell me what his name is. I will do the rest." I cup her face with my hands. "Tell me his name so I can go take care of him."

She stares at me, and I know then she isn't going to tell me.

"That's okay. I like a challenge. But don't be surprised when I find him."

Adalisa nods and looks away from me.

"Let's go get you home so you can eat and get settled." I kiss her forehead again.

If I could have Adalisa strapped to me so I could give her forehead kisses all the time, I would. But it would be impractical.

I help Adalisa off the counter and lead her toward my car.

I don't want her to go back to her apartment and be away from me, but she won't eat

here.

But that isn't going to last long. She will be living in my house soon and she won't be able to go back to her apartment.

I've already been speaking with her landlord, informing him that she will be moving out soon.

Adalisa isn't going to like me, but she will see that it's for the better.

"Let's get you to your apartment." I kiss her forehead once again as I buckle her in.

I lean against the chair as I look at Rolo.

"He's still in prison?" I ask.

Before I took Adalisa home, I texted Rolo to look into who was responsible for her at the time.

"It was her brother, Gerard, who was taking care of her. Her parents weren't in the picture, and he got mixed in with the wrong crowd," Rolo says, not answering my question.

I take a deep breath and grip the armrests.

"And he is still in prison?" I ask again, my voice held slight annoyance.

"I'm getting to that," Rollo quips, glaring at me. "It's not hard to get into their system, but each institution has a different way of organizing things. It takes a little bit of time."

I hold my hands up and try to patiently wait for him to find out whether he is still in prison or not.

“No, he is not,” Rolo finally answers my question.

I stand and walk over to him. “What do you mean he isn’t? I thought you said his sentence was life.”

“It was, but apparently he got out for good behavior. Said his sister was grown and he wouldn’t go after her.”

And for some reason, I don’t believe him. There are some things that you never do. Killing off a sibling is one of them.

“Find him. Now,” I instruct. “I want him found now so we can keep eyes on him. I don’t trust him.”

“I’ll find him and then track his location. When I get that done, I’ll let you know,” Rolo informs me. “Otherwise, go home and relax. It might take a little while, and I don’t want you over my shoulder asking me when I am going to get it.”

I raise my hand. “Okay, message received. I’ll just bug you every couple of minutes.”

Rolo glares at me again. “Don’t you dare. I will shut down your phone without a second thought. Do not test me.”

“I wouldn’t dare,” I honestly reply. “I need my sleep. I’ll be waiting for you to text me.”

“Now you sound like a woman waiting to hear back from me after a date,” Rolo mutters.

“We could play that out if you want. Though you would be the her and I would be the guy,” I chuckle.

Rolo glares at me once again before turning to his computer. Message received.

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 1:40 pm

ADALISA

I did not sleep well last night, and it is evident all over my face. Baggy, dark circles under my eyes, and my skin is pale.

Great.

This is not what I want, but I couldn't help but toss and turn last night. I wore the bracelet again for Matthias, wanting to feel the pleasure, but it never came. I didn't fall asleep for more than a couple of minutes at a time.

This is not what I needed.

I need to think of a plan to leave, but I don't know what else to do.

I've never done this before. I feel like I am missing some important things.

I don't have enough money to get a new identity or move across the States.

But I do have enough money to get a new apartment in a different part of town where the landlord won't ask questions about me paying in cash every month.

It isn't ideal since it is in a part of town that isn't safe, but I won't be leaving much.

Once I can secure it, I'll be telling my boss I'm going on vacation and won't be able to work for at least two weeks.

That will give me enough time to get some new clothes, change my hairstyle, and learn how to change the way I look.

Then he won't be able to recognize me. I've been practicing in front of a mirror, trying new accents and changing the pitch of my voice, so if he does come into work, then I won't sound like myself.

It's not ideal for me to come back to work so soon, but it's hard to find an online job—to find a job in general.

Two weeks is all I can manage without losing my job.

Now it's giving my boss enough heads up that she can find a replacement for those two weeks and also securing my new apartment and moving my stuff over there.

I'm going to rent a storage unit for a month or two to keep my stuff that I can't move into the apartment right away.

Someday I'll be back to get those once I move them.

Closing my eyes, I take a deep breath and slowly let it out.

"Everything is going to be okay," I mutter to myself and walk out of the bathroom.

I don't want to be at work today. I want to crawl back into my bed and sleep for the rest of the day and night. But nothing in life is ever easy or goes my way. I sit in my chair behind the counter and lean back, looking at the front door for any potential customers.

This is getting into our slump, where we don't have to be open all day, but my boss wants us to.

Or well, it's just me since Margery is still missing.

Is she all right? Matthias said she was, and that he could take me to her when he could, but I'm still worried.

"Have you eaten since I last saw you?" Matthias asks as he walks into the shop.

I sigh and look down at my hands. Why did he have to be here? Why couldn't he just leave me alone?

"Adalisa, answer me." He steps right in front of me.

I look up, my eyes slightly widening. How did he get to me so fast and quietly? He can't teleport. Was I really that out of it not to hear him?

"Adalisa," he gently says, placing a hand under my chin. "Did you eat last night when you got home, and did you eat breakfast this morning?" he questions, concerned.

"Yes, I did."

I didn't eat much last night since I didn't have a lot in my fridge, but it was enough to tide me over to this morning.

One egg and a piece of toast. That is all I had for breakfast. Thankfully, I'm not much of a breakfast person, so it was just enough for me.

Sadly, I don't have anything for lunch or dinner, and I know I will be suffering for that.

"And lunch?" He raises an eyebrow like he knows.

I stay silent as I look at him, knowing he already knows.

“Adalisa.” His voice drops an octave.

“I don’t, but it’s okay. I’ll grab groceries on my way home and make something tonight, and I’ll leftovers for work tomorrow,” I rant, unable to stop myself.

Matthias cups my face, and I melt into his touch. Oh, I love his hands around my face. It makes me feel so safe and secure, like nothing can happen to me. When was the last time I felt this way with someone?

Never.

I’ve never felt this way and feeling it with Matthias of all people is freaking me out a little. I shouldn’t feel this comfortable around him. I shouldn’t feel this safe around him, and yet I do.

“That won’t do,” he murmurs. “I won’t have you going without a meal.”

I pull my face from his hands. “I won’t eat anything you bring me.”

He sighs. “I know. Not even if it’s a cup of noodles I got from the store that hasn’t been opened? You can put the water on it after I give it to you sealed.”

I look at him, trying to figure out why he cares so much. I’ve never had anyone worry about how much I eat or when I eat before.

“Are you trying to poison me?” I blurt, my eyes going wide.

I push my chair back, flinging myself away from Matthias. If anyone knew how to get poison into food without it being detected, it would be Matthias. He said his job

isn't the best, and now he wants to make sure I eat.

No.

I won't have this happen again. Gone are all the safe and comfortable feelings, and now I am petrified.

"Woah." Matthias holds his hands up. "I'm not trying to poison you. I promise. I wouldn't do that to you. Not ever. I want you to be healthy, and skipping meals isn't good for you. You need the nutrition."

"And a cup of noodles is going to give me that?" I raise an eyebrow.

"It's better than nothing." He shrugs. "I don't want you to go without food. I want your stomach to be full, so you can properly do your job and not feel exhausted. I want you to be the best version of yourself."

My mouth hangs open as I stare at him. That was not what I was expecting him to say.

"I'll be fine. One meal isn't going to weaken me," I point out.

I just need to leave. Maybe I can call about the apartment and get it today. I need to get away from Matthias as soon as possible. If he is checking up on me now, he is going to be doing the same later.

"One meal isn't, but how many times have you done this?" he asks.

I shake my head. "No. We are not doing this. Thank you for stopping by, but you need to leave. I have work to do."

Matthias looks around the empty store, and I curse it being our slow time. Why couldn't someone have walked in behind him? "I think you have time right now to talk to me." He smiles. "I don't see anyone needing help."

"That doesn't mean I don't have work to do.

There are other things to do here that aren't helping customers.

I need to make sure things are stocked, things are in neat, we don't have any online orders, deliveries, unloading them away right away.

There are a lot of things to do around here, and I can't just talk to you all the time," I say in one breath.

I breathe hard as I look at him, waiting for him to reply.

"No."

My eyebrows shoot up. "No?"

"No. You aren't getting rid of me. If you need help, you will let me know and I will help you around the store. I know you normally have Margery here, but with her gone for who knows how long, you will need help," Matthias states.

I blink several times, taking in everything he said. I can't help but smile and then laugh. Matthias looks at me as I laugh, almost falling off my seat if it wasn't for him catching me.

"Are you done?" he asks.

I hold up a finger as I continue to laugh. Matthias wants to help me around the store?

I never thought I would hear that from him. Matthias doesn't seem the type of person who would help around a shop.

"O-okay," I finally manage to say, still chuckling. "I'm here now. Sorry. I just..." I crack a smile.

"Got a kick out of me saying I would help you?" he finishes my sentence.

I nod, trying my hardest not to laugh again.

Matthias bends down so he's at eye-level with me. "I don't appreciate being laughed at. This is your one warning."

My eyes go wide as I stare at him and nod. Will I laugh at him again? Probably. I can't help it when he says things like that.

"I wasn't really laughing at you," I mutter. "More at the images playing in my mind. You just don't seem like the type to work in a store."

"I'm not, and do not expect me to offer to help again," he growls.

I raise both of my hands. Right. I shouldn't have done that. Now I know, and I won't make that mistake again.

"Well then, you can go. I don't need you here." I shoo him with my hands. "I have things I need to get done."

But Matthias doesn't move. He stands in his spot, and I start fidgeting in my seat. Nope. Not good. Just from the way he is staring at me makes me want to start confessing things I shouldn't be. Things I am trying to keep to myself.

He continues to stare at me, making me fidget even more.

I suck in a breath. He can't possibly have found out my plans to get away, could he?

I didn't even think about that until now.

Matthias opens his mouth to say something, but his phone rings, stopping him.

Did I just get saved by his phone? I need to figure out who is calling him and thank them for helping me later.

He pins me with his eyes, holding his phone. "We will talk about this later. You are not getting away with not eating lunch."

I smile. "Right. Sure. Whatever you think and say. Now go."

Matthias looks at me once again before turning and walking out of my store. I let out a breath and lean back in my chair. I don't know how I'm going to do this every single time he talks to me, the push and pull.

I look at my desk and see a note. Is it from Matthias? When did he have time to write that for me?

Matthias

Be a good girl for me. Don't get into any trouble and shut the store for an hour or two to eat. -

ADALISA

“And I can pay in cash?” I ask over the phone.

“Yes, you can pay cash for however long you need. I don’t need your name,” the man replies. “We have a room available now if you want it.”

I look around my apartment. I didn’t want to do this so fast, but Matthias isn’t giving me any other option. Him showing up at work earlier today and asking questions isn’t what I thought was going to happen.

Nope.

I was hoping he would leave me alone today, which really shocked me when he showed up. I should have known. Matthias won’t leave me alone. That’s why I’m moving and changing my appearance so he can’t do anything to me.

“I would love that. I can be there in an hour. I just need to grab a couple of things,” I gently say. “Is that all right? Can you hold the room for me? I promise I’m good for payment for at least a month. And I can pay upfront if you need me to.”

I really need the room. I need to lay low and change my appearance when I get there.

“I’ll hold the room for you,” is all he says. “Come by tonight and I’ll give you a key.”

“Thank you,” I reply before he hangs up.

I take a deep breath and look around my apartment. What do I need right now that I won't be able to get later? I can't risk coming back to my apartment so soon when I know Matthias will be looking for me.

Toiletries and clothes.

Along with all the charging cords I need, appliances to go with those cords, and any spices for cooking.

"Everything is going to be okay," I whisper to myself. "Everything is going to work out, and I'm going to be safe."

But I have this bad feeling in my stomach that I can't shake. A feeling like I'm not going to be safe. One I've felt too many times.

"No," I push those thoughts out of my mind. "Not today. Not tomorrow."

I quickly go around the house, putting the necessary things in my duffel bag.

I'm packing light in case I need to run.

I won't be able to leave my stuff in the new place I'm staying.

When I first called, the landlord said anything left in the apartment will be sold if I don't pay rent on time. I'm not going to let that happen.

Taking one last look around the room, I take a deep breath and leave my apartment.

"Thank you so much. Here's a month's rent." I hand over the cash.

It was a lot of cash, but I don't want to forget and leave for work and lose all my

possessions. I'm not going to risk it.

The older man looks at me and grabs the cash. "A girl like you shouldn't be in this part of town. You in trouble, girly?"

I look around the lobby, checking if anyone else is in here. No one is, and I relax a little.

"Not in trouble," I quietly say, just in case someone is around the corner listening. What if Matthias has people in this building? "Are you running from someone?" he asks, holding the key to the room.

I want to reach over and grab it from him, but I don't need to get on his bad side. I need to be patient and let him hand it over to me.

"Do you always ask these questions? I thought this place would be safe. No names, pay in cash, and no questions," I rush out, looking around the lobby again.

On the way here, I was looking at my area, making sure Matthias wasn't following me. I have no idea what his men look like and if they are following me, but I didn't think anyone was.

I don't know what I'm doing here. I'm in way over my head, drowning with each passing second as I try to stay out of his reach.

"You're okay, girly. No names, pay in cash, and normally I don't ask questions.

Normally, the people coming here don't look like you.

You are young and have been looking around the lobby like someone is coming after you.

I want to make sure you are safe,” he says, holding his hands up. “You remind me of my daughter.”

“Oh,” I whisper.

What do I say to that? He seems genuinely worried, but I don’t want to go around telling everyone why I’m here. I don’t want people to know in case Matthias comes snooping around. It puts them in danger if they know the specifics.

“Is anyone going to come by asking questions?” he asks.

I shrug. “I don’t think so. I don’t think I was followed here, and I ditched my old phone outside my old apartment and got a new one with cash, so he couldn’t trace it.”

I didn’t want to get rid of it since it was only few months old, but I needed to. Matthias has my phone number, and I know he will be able to track me with it.

“Good. If you need any help, let me know. I’ve helped people hide before,” he offers, handing me the key. “You stay safe out there. I’m here in this building at all times. If anyone comes asking for you, I won’t say nothing.”

I give him a weak smile. “Thank you,” I whisper, getting emotional.

I shouldn’t trust a complete stranger, but he seems sincere in wanting to help me. I take the key and grab my duffel bag, hauling it over my shoulder.

“You’re on the first floor. Made sure you have a window in case the entrance is blocked. I don’t give this room to just anyone,” the man calls out.

“Thank you,” I reply, looking down at the room number on the key.

Sure enough, it is on the first floor. How sweet of him to help me out like this when he doesn't have to. To think about me needing to escape and having a window in the apartment.

Touching.

I am going to have to thank him when everything works out. Now I just need to lay low, change my appearance, and then I can head back to work with a whole new disguise. I even bought a fake pregnant belly to wear to work so I could change my appearance if Matthias shows up.

This is how dedicated I am to getting away from him. Changing everything about myself. I even thought about having fake tattoos to alter it even more, but I didn't have time to buy them.

I don't have a fake ID yet for another name. I will still be using my real one, and I don't want anyone tipping Matthias off that I am getting a tattoo somewhere.

"Home sweet home," I mutter as I walk into the room.

There is a couch and a bed in the one-room apartment.

Why does he advertise it as a one-bedroom apartment when it's technically no bedroom and just one big room for everything?

There is a small kitchen to my right, the bed in the back corner, and the couch in the middle of the room.

I'm surprised the bathroom isn't out in the open.

I place my bag down on the ground and lock the door.

The locks aren't very safe. Anyone could get in.

Maybe after I dye my hair tomorrow, I can buy another lock and install it.

Do I know what I'm doing? Absolutely not, but I've seen you can place something on the existing lock to make it harder to get into.

Exhaustion weighs down on me as I look at the bed.

First, I'll can take a nap, and then I can unpack everything and figure out food.

I groan and close my eyes. I've brought some of my spices, but I didn't bring any food with me.

How am I going to do this? The kitchen here isn't fully equipped with everything I need to cook, and I can't buy premade food.

No.

Taking a deep breath in, I slowly let it out. First, a nap, and then I can think about everything else. I need a clear mind when I think about everything and make decisions. After walking to the bed, I pull back the covers and slide in.

"Perfect," I mumble, getting comfortable and falling asleep.

Knock. Knock. Knock.

Slowly blinking my eyes, I try to make them focus. What is going on? Why is someone pounding on my door? Could it be the landlord? No, he said he wouldn't bother me unless it were super important.

Knock. Knock. Knock.

Groaning, I push myself up off the bed. Wouldn't he say something if he needs me? I look at the door suspiciously. Something doesn't feel right. I feel like he would be announcing himself if he needs something, giving me peace of mind.

Matthias can't have found me. It's only been a couple of hours since I left my apartment. Maybe I need to leave New York City for a while. But when will I know if everything has calmed down?

Margery isn't answering her phone, and I don't know where she is. She is the only person I would trust. If she were here, I would have to explain about Matthias, which I should have in the beginning, but I didn't want to scare her.

Knock. Knock. Knock.

I glare at the door. What am I going to do? There is no peephole and no window to look out of into the corridor. I would be opening the door completely blind, and I don't like that. Maybe if I pretend I'm not here, they will eventually stop knocking and leave.

I sit on my bed and look at the door. I'm going to wait for them to leave before I do anything. But how am I going to know if they have left? I can't call the owner and ask, and ruin my chances of them hearing me.

My heart starts racing as I pin my gaze on the front door. What am I going to do? I am not prepared for something like this. How am I going to figure out who it is and how they found me? Maybe it's just a drunk who's come into the building. Whoever it is will leave when I ignore the door.

Knock. Knock. Knock.

Or maybe not. I clench my jaw as I look at the door and stand. I shouldn't be doing this, but they are clearly not going away, and I need them to go away. Matthias can't have found me that fast or known I was trying to leave him.

Quietly, I walk to the door and place my ear against it.

"Open up," a deep voice calls out.

Not the next apartment, and it doesn't sound like Matthias. Taking a deep breath, I open the door and gasp.

"Hello, wife," Matthias says, smiling.

ADALISA

As I slam the door, Matthias places his foot inside at the very last second. I take several steps back as I stare at him wide-eyed. He can't be here. How did he find me so fast?

"Did you really think you could get away from me?" Matthias opens the door. "Did you really think you were keeping it a secret that you were trying to leave?"

I rush backward. Maybe I can open the window and jump before he can get to me. But as I look at the window and back at Matthias, I know I won't be able to make it. I don't know how the window opens, which will waste precious time that I don't have. What am I going to do?

I should have opened the window before or at least checked it out before I went to bed, but I didn't. I should have checked it. I should have made sure everything was okay. Why didn't I?

Because I was exhausted and wanted to rest. I didn't think he would find me so soon.

"Adalisa," he growls. "Answer me."

"N-no," I stutter, not really remembering the questions he was asking. Hopefully, it is the right answer and I haven't shot myself in the foot.

"So why did you run, wife?" he asks. "Why did you try to leave me and hide?"

Wife? What is he talking about?

“I see you’ve caught on to what I was saying, wife.” He repeats the word again.

“Are you trying to insinuate what is going to happen next?” My voice is shaky from nerves.

Matthias takes a step toward me. “No.”

My eyebrows pull together. No, he isn’t. So what is he talking about? I know for sure we haven’t gotten married. I haven’t gone to the courthouse, said I do, and signed the paperwork. I would have remembered that.

He takes another step toward me, a smile blossoming across his face. “We’re married now .”

“I think I would remember going to the courthouse,” I tell him, taking another step back.

My eyes dart around the room quickly, trying to see if I can come up with any sort of exit plan. But Matthias is closing in on me, backing me into a corner, and I don’t have anywhere to escape. What am I going to do? How am I going to get out?

Matthias takes another step toward me, cornering me, and the smirk on his face shows me that he knows it as well. Shit. This is not good.

“You don’t remember since you weren’t there,” he replies, still advancing on me.

“But the marriage certificate is real, and a judge was present when we got married. We are legally married, and there is nothing you can do about it. No divorce lawyer will help you, no judge will reverse it. You are legally bound to me like I am legally

bound to you.”

I shake my head. “No judge would do that.”

Matthias makes a tscking sound. “A lot of judges would do it, especially when there is incriminating evidence against them. You’d be surprised how much you can accomplish with evidence.”

He closes the distance between us. My heart sinks as I stare at him. He is telling the truth; I can feel it in my bones, and I don’t know what to do now. How am I going to get out of this?

“Now, you can either come with me the easy way or the hard way. You get to decide, but you are not staying here.” Matthias holds his hand out.

This is when I wish I had a knife in my hand so I could stab him. To feel the satisfaction of hurting him and possibly being able to get away. But sadly, I don’t own one.

“No one in this building is going to help you.” Matthias leans closer to me. “They know not to mess with the Montgomery Syndicate.”

I look at him and then at the doorway. There is no way I will get by him and out the door. He is way too close to me.

“The easy way or the hard way?” Matthias repeats his question, blocking my view of the exit. “Answer now or I’ll pick one for you.”

“Easy way,” I mumble, my shoulders dropping in defeat.

I don’t want to make a scene if no one is going to help me. It would be pointless. I

need to be smart about this. Matthias holds his hand out as he looks at me. Right. He probably wants me to hold his hand as we walk out, so I can't run anywhere.

I take his hand, and he holds on tight as he picks up my bag, slinging it over his shoulder.

"The key," he demands.

I pick it up from the coffee table as we walk out of the room and toward the lobby. Dread fills me the closer we get. Matthias has found me, and I don't know where he's taking me now. What is he going to do to me? Am I going to survive?

I have so many questions and very few answers.

"You're all right," he whispers as we walk into the lobby. "Everything is going to be okay now. Give the keys to him."

With tears in my eyes, I look at the owner and give him the keys.

"I'm sorry, mi hija. I didn't tell no one. He just knew, and I can't do anything against the Montgomery Syndicate." He has so much sorrow on his face. "I would have helped you more if I could. I really would have."

"It's okay," I whisper, my voice breaking.

Before he can say anything else, Matthias tugs on my hand lightly, pulling me out of the building. I suck in a deep breath as we walk out. I was not expecting to be leaving so soon.

Matthias will always find me.

He helps me into his truck, buckling me in before shutting my door and walking around. I try the handle and quickly realize that he has put the child lock on, and I can't get out. Great. He is always one step ahead.

"Adalisa," Matthias gently says, catching me off guard.

I thought he would be pissed off and angry when we got into the car. I was not expecting him to sound so soft and calm.

"Look at me," he commands.

I search his face for any type of anger, but I see none. Is he not mad at me?

"I'm not angry with you," he says. "Annoyed that you tried to leave? Yes, absolutely, but I'm not mad. I saw it way before you even thought about it. I knew you were going to try and leave, so I put a tail on you. You almost spotted him, but he quickly switched."

I knew it. I knew he had someone following me. For him to know where I was so quickly. It was either that or him putting a tracking device on me.

"But it is unacceptable for you to come to this part of town and put yourself in danger." Matthias grips my chin with his fingers.

"One of your rules is to not put yourself in danger, yet you have again. This part of town is known for what they do to pretty women. Yet you decided to come here and stay in a motel."

I blink several times. it's news to me that this part of town is known for that.

I've never heard of that before. I knew it wasn't the best part of town, but I wasn't

expecting it to be that bad.

Is that why the owner was asking me all those questions and was concerned for me? Why didn't he say anything?

"You will not put yourself in danger again," Matthias states. "I will not allow it. You will not be doing anything without my consent."

"You can't do that!" I raise my voice.

He arches an eyebrow. "This is the second time you've put yourself in danger, and this time you aren't wearing the bracelet. Do you know how worried I was when Dahmere called me to say you were in this part of town?"

And now I feel bad for making him worry. I thought he would just forget about me and move on. I didn't actually think he would worry that something happened and try to find me.

"You can't control where I go and who I see. I am an adult," I tell him, brushing off the guilt.

He has claimed me, and now we are married. I shouldn't feel guilty for making him worry about me.

"I do. From now on, any time you want to go anywhere, there will be someone with you. You will ask permission to go anywhere. If I find out that you left without the guard or without getting the okay from me, your bottom will be hot." Matthias' voice drops an octave, and he looks me in the eye. "Do you understand?"

I don't say anything. I am not going to agree to this. There is no way.

“Adalisa,” he growls. “Do you understand?”

“I understand what you just said, but that doesn’t mean I’m actually going to do it,” I reply.

“You understand. That means you know the consequences if you break those rules,” he releases my chin and starts up the car.

We sit in silence as he drives. Have I made a mistake? Should I have go with everything he asks me to do and think?

No.

I need to not think about that. Everything I did was to keep myself safe. Leaving him was my only option. I didn’t think I would get caught so soon, but this is the only option.

Was the only option.

I have no doubt Matthias is going to be keeping an eye on me from now on and make it so much more difficult to get away.

“We are staying at the compound with Ethan and Margery,” he informs me.

“Margery?” My head whips to face him. “Margery, as in my friend?”

ADALISA

“ Y es, Margery is your friend. She has been safe the whole time, like I told you. Ethan didn’t want anyone to see her yet, but I need more eyes on you when I go out,” he explains.

“Wait. Hold up.” I raise my hand.

He couldn’t actually be talking about that Ethan, could he?

Ethan is dead. Ethan died years ago in the car crash.

“What?” Matthias asks, pulling up to a gate.

I look around quickly. The walls are one foot deep, made out of concrete, and probably seven feet tall or higher, with barbed wire at the top. How am I going to get out of here? There is even a guard in a little shed next to the gate.

There is no way.

Shit.

“Adalisa?” Matthias asks. “What’s wrong?”

“Ethan as in Margery’s Ethan who died?” I search his face.

There is no way that Ethan survived and Margery didn’t know about it. She told me

she identified the body.

“Faked his death,” is Matthias replies.

I blink several times as I stare at the back of his head. Ethan faked his own death and didn't tell Margery? I thought he loved her.

“So, her telling me that she kept seeing him and he was leaving her presents was actually true,” I whisper to myself.

“Yes, it was. I was the police officer who kept her from actually calling the police. Not that they would have done much. They didn't the first time, and they weren't going to after that. They thought it was a harmless secret admirer.” Matthias starts to drive when the gates fully open.

“I was one of those people,” I mumble, leaning back into my seat.

I was wrong. So wrong. Margery wasn't going mad, and she didn't need to go to a facility. She was actually seeing her dead ex-boyfriend.

Why didn't I believe her?

“Margery and Ethan aren't here right now. They are in a cabin until the end of the week. She is recovering and needs more sleep. She couldn't sleep with so many guards around her and so much noise.” Matthias unbuckles himself and turns toward me.

I hadn't realized we have parked in front of the big mansion.

“She doesn't know you are here yet, and Ethan isn't going to tell her until they are heading back. When they do get back here, you will be respectful to them. This is

their house, and Ethan is graciously letting us stay here while I work so people can watch over you,” Matthias unbuckles me.

“I don’t need a babysitter.” I roll my eyes.

“You do. I won’t have you sneaking off again. You are my wife, and there is nothing you can do about it,” he states.

Maybe I should have really thought through what I was going to do if he caught me.

Matthias gets out of the car before I can say anything and walks to my side and opens the door. He grabs my hand and helps me out, keeping me in his hold as he walks me to the front door. I try to look around, but Matthias doesn’t give me time to.

“Can I not look around?” I ask.

“You’ll have time for that later,” he replies. “Right now, we need to get food into you.”

My whole body locks up. I desperately want food, but I know I won’t be able to eat anything. I hadn’t thought about that when I left my apartment..

“I brought some of your food here from your fridge,” Matthias says, taking me to the kitchen. “Which we will be talking about at a later time..”

I shake my head and take a step back. There is no way I am going to eat that now. Matthias has been in my apartment. He has taken my food out of the fridge. How do I know he hasn’t contaminated the food? I wasn’t here to watch him.

“Adalisa,” he gently says, taking a step toward me. “You need to eat. I bet you haven’t eaten since lunch yesterday.”

It was breakfast; I didn't have any lunch. I am starving. But this has happened to me before. I've gone places and haven't been able to eat. Does it suck? Absolutely, but it is nothing I haven't dealt with before and won't deal with again.

"How about this?" He walks back into the kitchen, and I follow him. "You wash a spoon so you know that it's clean."

I do as he says and get to washing a spoon, making sure to keep my eye on him as he brings out one of my food containers. As I'm drying the spoon, Matthias sets it down beside me and takes the lid off.

What now?

"I am going to eat a spoonful, and then you'll see that it's safe. That you can eat what you need to," he states.

"That's not how it works," I mumble. "One bite isn't going to hurt you."

Matthias cups my face with his hands. "And one meal isn't going to hurt until we can go to the grocery store."

He's right, but I don't let the anxiety to hit me.

"I would never give you any food that is contaminated, I promise," he gently says. "I would never put you in harm's way. You are too precious to me, and the thought of putting something in there makes me physically ill."

I look down at the food and then back up at him. He gives me a small smile.

"How about this?" he starts. "How about I take a bite and then you take a bite, and we go back and forth. That way, I get the same amount of food. Will that make it better?"

Will it?

It will definitely ease my nerves a little. “Is that okay?” Matthias asks again. “Do you think you can do something like that?”

I nod and look at the food, not wanting to see whatever emotion is pasted across his face. I know he is happy, but at what expense? “No, look back at me. You don’t look away,” Matthias declares. “Look into my eyes.”

I look back at him and lean into his right hand.

The warmth of his hands seeps into my skin, and I could fall asleep right here.

I shouldn’t, especially when I’m mad at him for finding me so quickly and for bringing me to this compound where I definitely won’t be escaping.

I should be trying to get away from him at all costs, yet here I am about to share food with him.

How messed up am I?

A lot.

I can’t seem to help but want to be around him all the time. I want him to touch me, feed me, and take care of me. I shouldn’t want that with someone like him.

“We are not going to think about anything,” he firmly says. “You and I are going to eat and talk. We aren’t going to think about anything else, understand?”

“Yes,” I whisper. “That’s easier said than done.”

Does he really think I can just shut off my brain and not think about anything? Does he realize how ridiculous that is for him to say that?

“You are going to do it because that is what I demand of you.” He kisses my nose. “I want you to focus on me and nothing else. Do you think you can do that?”

I shrug and try to get my face out of his hold. Can I do that? It’s a tall order, and I’m not really in the mindset to do it.

“We’re going to try. I’ll help you so you aren’t doing it alone. Would it be better for you to be watching something so your mind is off everything and I can feed you?” he asks.

I grip his wrists and shake my head, my breathing picking up at the thought. Nope. There is no way I am going to be watching TV while he feeds me. I can’t get caught watching something and not see if he puts something in it or not.

“All right, you’re okay,” he coos at me. “Everything is going to be okay. No TV while we eat. Forget I said that.”

I suck in a deep breath and close my eyes for a couple of seconds. No TV while we watch. I can do that. I can definitely do that.

“Good girl,” he whispers. “You’re safe. We’ll just talk, so you can keep your attention on me and can see that nothing is happening.”

My shoulders sag, and I nod. Right. I can do this. Everything is going to be okay because he won’t be able to do anything. I washed the spoon myself. He got the food out, but I didn’t see him take it from my fridge. I didn’t have an eye on it then.

“No thinking,” Matthias whispers. “No thinking about it at all. We are going to talk

and nothing else. I want your attention on me and only me.”

“Arrogant,” I mutter.

He smirks. “I wouldn’t be your husband if I weren’t.”

His words leave me speechless as he lets go of my face and takes a step back.

His arrogance shouldn’t be a turn-on, yet when I look at Matthias in front of me, I can’t help but feel aroused and want to be around him.

There is just something about him that speaks to my soul, and I can’t figure it out.

“Come on, let’s get some food inside you.” Matthias grabs the container and walks around the island. “Sit next to me.”

I quickly follow him and sit beside him, looking at the food. My mouth salivates at the sight.

“Do you want me to warm it up?” he asks.

I shake my head. “I normally eat my food cold. I like it better that way. Put it in the microwave and it might get too hot and I could burn my mouth.”

The number of times that I have eaten something after microwaving it and burning my mouth. I don’t want to do it again, so I have just stopped heating things up. It’s easier that way.

“I can check the food before you eat it to make sure it’s the right temperature and won’t hurt you,” Matthias offers, holding his hand out.

Without thinking, I hand him the spoon. He would really do that for me? I've never had someone want to make sure my food was the right temperature so I didn't hurt myself. Where did he come from, and why is he making me fall for him with every little thing he says?

"Open up," he says.

Sweet potato and a little chicken are on the spoon, and I open my mouth, waiting.

"Good girl for letting Daddy feed you," he praises me, and I take a bite.

My eyes go wide as I stare at him. I just let him feed me. How did he get the spoon? I don't remember handing it over to him. I thought he would have his own spoon, but I am mistaken.

"Ah, no thinking too much," Matthias reminds me. "Yes, I am feeding you, and you like it. You can keep a better eye on the food. I won't let go of the container or the spoon. I want you to just focus on eating and relaxing."

I open and close my mouth, trying to come up with something to say to him to get my spoon back. Maybe I can just get another one.

"Don't even think about it. I did not give you permission to get up." Matthias raises an eyebrow at me. "Do not think about getting up. I am taking care of you, and you are going to let me take care of you. Understand?"

My shoulders sag, and I nod. "Yes," I mumble.

"Yes, Daddy."

I shake my head and look away. I know I'm taking my eyes off the food, but I can't

call him Daddy out loud. That is going to cross a line I am not ready to cross yet, which he knows.

“Soon,” Matthias says. “Now, open your mouth again so you can take another bite.”

We go at this for a while, him feeding me and then taking a bite, and I find myself relaxing even more into my chair with each bite. What is wrong with me? I should call this a win, but I can’t help but stare at Matthias and wonder.

“I can see your brain working again, and I want you to stop.” Matthias feeds me the last bite. “I don’t want you to think about anything at all. Focus on me.”

I glare at him. “My focus is not always going to be on you.”

“Well, it should be,” he replies. “Your attention and thoughts should always be on me. That is what I want, and I think I’m pretty close to achieving it.”

If only he knew I constantly think about him. He is somehow always on my mind, and I don’t know how to stop it. “Come on.” Matthias holds his hand out, leaving my container on the counter. “We’re going to leave the dish for the maid to clean up.”

“No.” I look at him like he is crazy.

“Yes, we are. I’m surprised she let us take it out of the fridge.

She has been working for Ethan for years and has a certain way of how she likes the fridge and kitchen.

She normally doesn’t allow any of us to touch anything in here.

Trust me, if she was here, she would give the same speech,” Matthias explains.

He holds his hand out, and I take it, looking back at the container that was once filled with food I had made. I really did it. I really ate that food without knowing it was safe.

Am I at a turning point in my life?

“We’re going to bed. I have a couple of things I need to get done tomorrow, and then we are going grocery shopping and cooking,” Matthias informs me.

“Will the maid be okay with me being in the kitchen cooking?” My eyebrows furrow as I look at him.

“I will be speaking with her tomorrow about that. She will understand.” Matthias sits on the bed.

I look around briefly. Everything in here is black or gray. It’s very clean and minimalist.

“This is my room when I am here. As you can tell, I don’t stay here often. If you need anything, I want you to tell me and we can get it while we are out or I can have someone get it for us.” Matthias pulls me between his legs.

I try to take a step back, but his arms keep me in place. We lock eyes, and he looks at me like he is seeing me for the first time.

“You are so precious to me,” he whispers. “Too precious that sometimes I don’t think I deserve you, but I’m never letting you go.”

I thought he sounded really sweet until he said he was never letting me go. And just like that, he has popped the bubble around me and made me realize that I am here against my will.

“Come on, let's get to bed.” He kisses my lips quickly.

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 1:40 pm

ADALISA

I look right and left, making sure the hallway is clear before I take a step out of the room.

Earlier today, I ran into the maid, Nala, and scared myself.

I immediately ran, and she yelled to say who she was, but I didn't stop.

I was just orienting myself with the house when I ran into her.

Ever since then, I've been in the room Matthias and I slept in last night.

"It's okay," I whisper to myself. "No one is going to pop out this time."

Matthias hasn't been home all morning. He left a note saying I needed to eat breakfast and to drink water, but I didn't pay attention to any of that. Did he really think I was going to eat something that Nala prepared for me?

No.

I may have done something unusual yesterday, but I am not going to do that today. Once was enough for me.

Now I am trying to find ways to escape. I first need to figure out how to get out of the house, and then I'll figure out how to get out of the compound. One step at a time. I need to rush this.

Margery is coming at the end of the week, and I so desperately want to see her again, but I don't want to meet Ethan. I don't want to see Margery and have her try to convince me to stay with Matthias. Maybe Margery will be able to help me get out of here if I stay.

I can't risk it.

I look out the window, trying to see if any guards are walking by, and when none do, I smile to myself. This could definitely be a window I crawl out of. It's close to the ground.

"I wouldn't go out of that window if I were you," Nala announces.

Screaming, I bang my head against the wall as I turn toward her. I hold my head as tears pool in my eyes.

"Ouch. Ouchie," I whimper, sitting on the ground as I lean forward with my hand still on my head where I hit it.

A sharp ache radiates across my head. I don't want to let go, but I need to get away from Nala before she tells someone what I was doing. I can't get caught. Not again.

"Oh, sweetie. Let me look at it," Nala soothingly says.

I shake my head, keeping my hand on the hurt spot and not looking at her. I don't want to let go and have Nala look at it. What if she pokes and prods at it?

No.

Not happening.

“Come on, sweetie. I’m not going to do anything. Everything is going to be all right. Just let me take a little look so I can see if it’s bleeding,” she soothes.

I shake my head once again and look at her. “Not bleeding.”

I would know since I am currently holding my head.

“Let me take a look at it to make sure. I don’t want anything happening or getting infected,” Nala insists.

My eyes go wide. Infected? Does she really think my head was going to get infected by something? I shake my head once again and wince. It has stopped hurting by now, but I don’t know Nala, and I don’t want her to do anything to me.

Nope. That is definitely not going to happen. I am not going to let her anywhere near my head.

“I don’t think I want to know what just went through your head,” she mutters and sits in front of me.

“I’m not going to hurt you. I promise, Adalisa.

You mean something to Matthias, and I love him like he is my own son.

The fact that he came into the kitchen this morning, knowing it is my domain and no one else cooks in it, to ask if you could and explain a little bit about why...

You mean a lot to him. I’ve never seen him act like that with someone before.

I’ve never seen him be so interested in the person’s well-being and making sure they are eating. ”

My mouth falls open as I stare at her. I knew Matthias was going to talk to her this morning, but I didn't think it would mean that much. I thought it was something simple, but I was wrong... again.

Matthias really cares about me. I thought he was just obsessed with me for some weird reason and didn't want to let me go until he got bored with me. But to think that he actually cares and other people are saying he does... that is something completely different.

No.

I close my eyes. I cannot think about this. I can't have them try to make me change my mind about staying here. "What are you two doing on the floor?" Matthias asks from the end of the hallway.

I take a deep breath in. He cares about me, and I can see it more as he looks up and down my body, a light worry in his eyes.

"Why is Adalisa holding her head?" he asks, walking toward us. "Adalisa, what's happened? Are you okay?"

"I scared her, and she hit her head on the wall." Nala winks at me.

What is she doing? I don't need Matthias coming to check on me. My head is fine now, I just forgot to take my hand off it.

"Oh, baby." Matthias rushes to me. "Are you okay? Do you need me to look at it and see if you need anything? Why don't you move your hand so Daddy can see where you hit your head and make it all better?"

Matthias bends down in front of me, and I gaze at him with my mouth open. I was not

expecting him to care so much about a simple bump on the head.

“Come on, Little one.” Matthias places his hand on my arm that is still touching my head.

“It’s fine,” I rush, scooting back. But I don’t get far with Matthias kneeling in front of me. “I really am okay. It happened a few minutes ago. It doesn’t hurt anymore.”

I look past Matthias to see Nala giving me a knowing look before disappearing around the corner. She knew he would fuss over me.

“Baby, let me see your head,” Matthias firmly says. “Hitting your head is a very serious thing, no matter how light or hard you hit it. I need to look at it to make sure you are okay.”

Sighing, I drop my hand and let Matthias check it out. He pokes and prods, I don’t make any sound as it doesn’t hurt, and before I know it, Matthias is leaning back and looking at me seriously.

“I have some good news and some bad news. Which do you want first?” Matthias asks.

Good news and bad news? What is he talking about?

“Good?” I sound so unsure. “No, wait. I want the bad first. Wait. Actually, can you tell me the good news first?”

“Put her out of her misery, Matthias,” Nala shouts from the corridor.

Matthias chuckles. “Good news is your head is perfectly fine. Bad news is, it’s fine, and now you have to come grocery shopping with me.”

That was the bad news? I thought he was going to say something about part of my head needed to be chopped off or that I was going to need brain surgery.

I don't see leaving the house as bad news.

"Do you think you can manage that? I know you don't like going out too much anymore, but I do want you eating. If that means going to the grocery store so you can pick out your own food, so be it," Matthias stands up and holds his hand out.

I stare at it. Is Nala right? Does he really care for me that much that he is willing to take me grocery shopping?

"Let's go," I say, taking his hand for him to help me up.

"Don't try anything in the store; no one will help you. They all know who I am," Matthias warns as we walk into the store.

Right. Of course he would take me somewhere that he knows everyone so no one would help me. Smart of him. I know it might take a while, but I'm still hoping that he'll mess up and I'll be able to run away.

Even if that means leaving a place I feel safe in.

It shocks me every single time I think about it.

I feel safe with Matthias around me. I can't deny that I have feelings for him, how would I not?

He has mostly treated me amazingly. Even when he gets all possessive and growly at me, it turns me on and makes me want to stay with him.

I do want to stay with him, so badly but I can't.

I stop walking and look at him with wide eyes.

Am I okay?

No, something must be wrong with me. I need to sit in my room and think about everything and get back on track. I can't be thinking like this.

"Adalisa?" Matthias gently asks, taking a step closer to me. "You're okay. Everything is going to be okay."

How does he know that? My whole world is going up in flames right now, and I don't know what to do to put it out.

"Everything is going to be fine." He wraps his arms around me, holding me tightly.

I suck in a deep breath and grip his shirt, not wanting him to let go of me anytime soon. Are we in the middle of the grocery store? Yes, but I don't really care right now.

"Such a good girl," he whispers. "I'm so proud of you. You keep taking what's thrown at you."

Everything that has been thrown at me has been from him. He has given me everything, and it is exhausting trying to continue to move forward and have faith that one day I am going to get away.

But what if I don't want to get away anymore?

I suck in a deep breath and pull away from Matthias.

My head is one big mess right now, and I don't know what to think or believe.

Everything is overwhelming, and I don't know how to get help.

Margery isn't here to listen to me. I don't know if she is the best person to go to right now.

I don't know how she is doing mentally, and I don't want to burden her with something like this.

Matthias grabs my hand before I can walk off without him. "I've got a basket and you can put whatever you need in here. Nala has already moved some stuff in the fridge, so you have space. No one is going to touch it."

I haven't been worried about anyone touching the food in the fridge until now. How many people are in the house that could interfere with it?

"We aren't going to think like that." Matthias starts walking to the produce. "No one is allowed in the fridge unless it is Ethan, Margery, Nala, you, and me. Nala is in the kitchen most of the time, so you won't have to worry about much."

I don't know Nala that well, but I feel like I can trust her. She wasn't trying to hurt me today and actually spoke about Matthias and what he has already done for me. What he is still doing and will continue to do.

How did I get so lucky?

No. Stop thinking about it.

It doesn't take me long to start filling up the basket as we walk up and down the aisles. Meal ideas are popping into my head with every step, and I want to make all of

them, but I've settled for three for now.

"Do you have everything you need?" Matthias asks.

I turn to him and stop dead in my tracks, my eyes automatically finding the ones I haven't seen since I was a kid. How did he get here?

"Adalisa?" Matthias calls out my name, but he sounds so far away.

Gerard shouldn't be here. He was still supposed to be in prison. How did he get out? He cocks his head to the side and smiles.

"Adalisa?" Matthias takes a step closer to me, but I don't answer him.

I need to keep my eye on him the whole time. What if he was in the store before me?

My breathing comes out in short gasps as we continue to stare at each other. He can't hurt me, yet he totally can. I thought I would never see him again, but here he is, standing twenty feet away from me in a grocery store when he should be in prison.

"Baby." Matthias touches my arm. "What's wrong?"

"Gerard's here," I whisper, my voice shaking as fear courses through my body.

I shouldn't be afraid of him. I'm an adult who can take care of herself, but I can't seem to shake this fear. How did he get out? What did I ever do to him to deserve this?

Out of the corner of my eye, I see Matthias turn around and follow my gaze, but my brother isn't there anymore. No. He was right there. How did he disappear in a couple of seconds? That shouldn't have been possible.

“He was right there, I promise,” I barely get out. “He was right there the whole time. I promise I’m not going crazy.”

“You’re okay, I believe you. Let’s pay for this food, and then we can talk to the manager to get the security tapes to see where he came from,” Matthias tries to calm me, taking my hand.

“I don’t want it.” I shake my head. “I don’t want the food. What if he sprinkled something on them or what if he injected it with something? I’m not going to take that risk.”

I look at Matthias, tears pooling in my eyes.

I can’t do this again. I was getting so much better at buying food from the store.

I can’t do this again. I am tired of Gerard winning all the time.

There isn’t anything I can do about it. He has instilled this fear in me that I can’t shake no matter what I do.

“Adalisa, we’ll fix this. We can wash everything when we get home,” Matthias gently says.

I shake my head once again. “No, I can’t. I won’t be able to eat any of it. I really can’t. Please don’t make me.”

Matthias pulls me into his chest, my face presses into him as I take a deep breath. I feel the vibrations of him talking, but I can’t make much out.

“Go... store... buy... compound,” is all I catch.

What is Matthias doing? He doesn't give me much time to think about it as he pulls me up in his arms, and I wrap my legs around his waist.

"You're okay," he whispers into my ear. "Diego is going to go to another store several hours away for us. Your brother won't be able to have put anything on them there."

Here he is again doing something really sweet for me. Wait, did he say brother? He knows the person who was poisoning me was my brother?

"I know, baby. I knew a couple hours after you told me," Matthias explains as he starts to walk. "We're going to talk to the manager really quickly before we go home and just relax and rest."

For once, I'm thankful we are staying at the compound.

Somewhere I didn't think I would ever be grateful for.

After seeing my brother again, it brings me some type of peace knowing that I will be safe in there.

Nothing is going to happen to me there. I can't wait to get back.

Just being in Matthias' arms brings me comfort and security.

"Just relax while I deal with things and then we'll go home." He places a hand on my neck, keeping me in place.

And I do just that.

MATTHIAS

A nger courses through me as I walk to the manager's office with Adalisa in my arms. How did her brother find her here? I had Rolo look into her history to see if her brother would be able to find her easily. He said she was careful in a lot of things that she did and moved to New York a while ago.

So how did he find her?

I hold her tighter, wanting to make sure she knows she is safe but also needing to know she is in my arms and not going anywhere. I am not going to let Gerard do anything to Adalisa. He will never get close to her again, no matter what.

"John." I nod as I walk into his office.

"Matthias, what can I do for you? Could Nala not find something? We probably have it in the back. We can order it if we don't have it," John rushes out the words as he stands.

"Relax, John. Nala was able to find everything she needed earlier this week," I reply. I keep my hand on the back of Adalisa's neck, wanting to bring her a little comfort as I talk.

"What can I do for you then? Is everything all right?" John exhales deeply and sits behind his desk.

"I need copies of the security tapes for today and yesterday. All of your cameras," I

state. “You can send them to Rolo now.”

Of course. May I ask why? Should I be keeping my eye out for anyone?” John asks.

I run my hand up and down Adalisa’s back as she starts to shake. I need to get her home and out of prying eyes before she breaks down.

“We’ll give you a picture when we have one,” I reply. “Send it to Rolo. Everything from yesterday and today.”

I don’t wait for his reply as I walk out of his office, through the store, and out to my car. My eyes scan the parking lot, but no one sticks out.

“We’re going home,” I gently explain, trying to get her into her seat but she won’t let go. “Baby, I need you to let go of me so I can drive home.”

She shakes her head and holds me tighter.

“I know you don’t want to, but you need to. When I get in the car, we can hold hands, but I need to get to the driver’s seat so I can get us back to the compound,” I instruct her.

I don’t want to be out here longer than we have to. We are sitting ducks, waiting for someone to sneak up on us and do something bad. But I won’t let that happen on my watch.

“Addy,” I whisper. “You’re okay. I need you to let go of me so I can get us somewhere safe.”

Adalisa pulls away from me, her eyes wide as she stares at me. “Not safe?”

“I don’t want to scare you, but we need to go to the compound. We’ll be safer there,” I calmly tell her, not wanting to worry her more than she is.

I can still see the terror on her face when she turned to talk to me, but instead, she saw her brother. The way her face went pale, and she started to shake. I never want to see that look in her eyes again.

Adalisa finally lets go of me, and I quickly buckle her in and shut the door, making my way over to the driver’s side and getting in. I grab her hand and pull out of the parking lot, heading straight toward the compound.

“Everything is going to be all right,” I tell her. “I am going to take care of everything and make sure you are safe. Nothing bad is going to happen to you.”

They will have to come through me before they get to her. She is too precious and has gone through too much already. I’m not going to allow her brother to ruin it again.

“How did he find me?” she whispers. “How did he get out of prison?”

“On good behavior,” I reply. “He showed them that he had changed and wasn’t going to go after you.”

“But he found me.”

I sigh. “I know, baby, but nothing is going to happen. I am going to keep you safe. Everything is going to be all right.”

Silence fills the car as I pull up to the gate, not rolling down my window to talk to the guard. There’s no time. I want her safely behind these walls.

“How did he find me?” she asks. “I paid for everything in cash when I moved here.”

I'm glad she knew enough about the situation not to leave a trail. Not that it matters now. He still found her. She said she paid in cash, but she could have withdrawn some cash and he was able to find it.

"I don't know, but I am going to find out. I'm going to take care of him," I promise her after I turn off the car.

Once I know Adalisa won't leave me, I am going to teach her everything so she knows what to do in a situation like this again. Not that she'll be in one if I have it my way. No, I am going to keep Adalisa safe for the rest of our lives.

"We'll figure this out," I gently tell her. "No one is going to get you in here. There are too many guards and a state-of-the-art security system to catch him if he tries."

What she doesn't know is that I messaged Ethan to let him know. They are coming home a little earlier than planned. It isn't ideal, but something that needed to happen. She'll get to see her friend, and Ethan and I will be able to hunt down Adalisa's brother.

"I just don't know how he found me or why he wants to find me now," she mumbles, looking so lost. "I haven't seen him since I was really little, and he tried to kill me. I'm grown up now, and he doesn't need to take care of me anymore. So why is he coming after me?"

Adalisa has tears in her eyes, and it breaks my heart. I cup her face with my hands, running my thumb across her cheek every once in a while. "I don't know why he's after you, but Ethan and I will find out, and we'll take care of him. Everything is will work out.."

She leans her face into my right hand, closing her eyes as she takes a deep breath.

Maybe... maybe this is exactly what we needed.

Maybe this is exactly what Adalisa needed to see that I am made for her and will do anything to keep her safe.

While I don't like that her brother has come back for her, maybe in the long run, this will give her the push she needs to stay with me.

"Adalisa," I whisper her name. "Everything is going to be all right. I am going to take care of everything and make sure nothing happens to you. You are going to be safe."

She blinks open and looks at me, exhaustion weighing on her face.

"Let's get you into bed," I gently say.

"It's only three in the afternoon," she mumbles.

"And you need some place to just lie down and decompress. A lot has happened, and it's okay to want to be somewhere quiet to come to terms with everything," I tell her.

"Don't leave me," she begs. "I don't want to be alone."

"Shhhh, I'm not going to leave you. Never."

ADALISA

I don't know how many hours Matthias and I have been lying here. am I going to do?

"You're thinking too hard." Matthias runs his hand through my hair.

I snuggle into his chest and let my body relax. Maybe then I'll convince him I've stopped thinking. It's hard to just stop. I can't turn off my brain and not think about my brother being after me once again.

I can't just not think about it. It doesn't work like that.

"I never thought I was going to see him again," I whisper. "I had fully prepared myself to never see him again, and to hear that he got out of prison, and I wasn't even notified. I don't know how to feel about that."

Matthias continues to stroke my hair, calming me down little. If this was any other time, I would be half-asleep on his chest, begging him to continue even after I was asleep. Maybe later he'll do this again if I ask... or beg.

"When I went to his sentencing, they told me he was going to be in prison for the rest of his life. That he would never get out. Then to hear that he has? It makes me sick to my stomach," I mumble, wrapping one arm around my stomach as I adjust my head on his chest. "It shouldn't happen. He shouldn't be out."

Tears pool in my eyes, and I blink several times, wanting to get rid of them. I don't want to cry. It needs to go away so I can try to move on and live my life.

“I need to leave.” I push off Matthias’ chest. “I need to leave and hide. I don’t want to be near him. If I leave, then he won’t be able to find me.”

Matthias sits up and shakes his head. “You are not leaving. He will follow you until you are too tired to continue to hide. Then he will catch you and harm you. I won’t have you getting hurt. You are going to be a good girl and follow everything that I say to do. You will be safe then.”

I open my mouth to say something when he places his finger across my lips.

“No. I will not hear an argument because we are not discussing it. You are going to stay here where you are safe while I find him and make him wish he had never gotten out of prison.” Matthias pins me with a look. “You aren’t going to argue. If you do, you will end up over my knee or in time-out.”

My mouth hangs open as I stare at him. “You can’t be serious.”

“I’m dead serious. I don’t mess around when it comes to your safety. You are important to me, and I’m not going to let you go. Not now and not ever.” He gets off the bed and stands to his full height. “Now come on. We need to get food inside you.”

I tentatively take his hand, not feeling up for eating but knowing I need to. He will make me since he knows I haven’t eaten anything all day. But the thought of food makes my stomach cramp with a force, and I double over and take a deep breath.

“Adalisa?” Matthias’ panicked voice fills the room. “What’s wrong? Tell Daddy what’s wrong.”

I clench my eyes shut, not wanting to look him in the eyes. He is going to think I’m silly for my stomach cramping with the thought of eating food.

“Addy, answer me right now. I need you to tell me what to do.” He kneels in front of me so his face is below mine.

“Shh, you’re okay,” he whispers. “I’ve got you. Just tell Daddy what’s wrong so I can make it better.”

Tears form in my eyes as I look at him. Genuine concern is written across his face as he stares into my eyes.

“Come on, Little one. Tell Daddy what’s wrong. I’m here,” he coos at me. “I’m not going anywhere. You can tell me anything.”

I shake my head and stand, my stomach still protesting as I look at him. I rest my arm on my stomach, trying to calm it down, but nothing is working.

“Oh, Little one,” he whispers. “Come on. Let me carry you to the kitchen.”

Matthias picks me up before I can say or do anything. I wrap my arms around him and lay my head on his shoulder. Just this once, I won’t fight him. Until I have the energy to do things for myself.

“I’ve got you,” he whispers as he starts to walk. “I’ve got you and nothing is going to happen.”

“Is everything okay?” Nala asks.

“She just had a rough time at the store,” Matthias gently replies. “Have the groceries arrived?”

“Yes, they just arrived, and I was about to put them away.”

“No need to.” Matthias sets me on the counter but still holds me. “I’ll put them away. I need to make something for Adalisa to eat.”

“Let me know if I can do anything.” Nala’s voice gets further away.

Matthias pulls back so I can see his face. “You are going to sit here and watch me cook. I know this isn’t the same as you doing it, but I wouldn’t let anything happen to your food.”

I don’t know if I am going to be able to eat food I even make, not that I have the energy for that at the moment.

“I know you don’t feel like eating, but I’m going to make something light so you can eat some of it.” Matthias kisses my forehead. “Let me take care of you. You’ll be watching the food the whole time.”

I should insist on me making it, but one gentle hand placement on my knee has me looking at Matthias.

“Everything is going to be okay. We’re going to take this slowly. You just sit there and relax while I cook.” He sounds so caring and gentle.

He knows I need it, so he is giving it to me. What did I do to deserve something like this? Nothing. I have done nothing.

“I’m going to make a simple chicken noodle soup,” Matthias continues to talk to me. “I had Diego go to the store and stock up on a lot of things so we could make a variety. Sadly, this won’t have much protein in it since I figured you wouldn’t like him buying a precooked chicken.”

I nod in agreement. Every single time I walk by them I love to smell and look, but the

thought of someone else handling the food makes it impossible for me to eat. Granted, everything is handled by other people, but I try not to think about it too much.

“We are going to get this water boiling, then put the pasta and some seasoning in it, and then I’ll feed it to you,” Matthias says as he starts to prepare the soup.

I watch him carefully, wanting to make sure he doesn’t do or add anything that I don’t know about. But he doesn’t try to hide anything. He explains everything he is doing and what the ingredients are, like he knows it’s going to calm me down.

“All done!” He dishes some out in a bowl and places a couple of ice cubes in it. “We’ll give this some time to cool off, and then I’ll feed you.”

“You don’t have to,” I mumble, feeling all shy.

I absolutely loved it when he fed me the other day, and I want more of it.

“I won’t have any of that.” He boops my nose. “I will be feeding you, and you will do as you are told.”

I nod, not having much fight in me. Not that I want him to stop.

“Such a good girl. Do you want to sit in the dining room or right here?” he asks.

I think about it for a second. If we go sit in the dining room, anyone walking by will be able to see us, but if we stay in the kitchen, no one will unless they walk in here. I look at Matthias, wanting to stay in here, but what if he wants to sit down?

“How about we stay in here. You look really comfortable,” he offers, like he knows what I really want.

I relax against the counter, taking a deep breath as I wait for Matthias. True to his word, he tests the soup against his lips before bringing it up to my mouth.

“The temperature is just perfect for you,” he tells me.

I close my eyes as I swallow, prepared for my body to fight me on this. I didn’t cook this. I didn’t buy any of the ingredients. But my body doesn’t do anything, surprising me.

“Good girl,” he whispers, and I look at him. “Such a good girl for Daddy.”

I am a good girl for Daddy. Taking another bite, I relax onto the counter, leaning my head against the cabinet. Matthias continues to feed me until all of the soup is gone from the bowl. Matthias quickly places everything in the sink before turning to me.

“Come on, let’s get you in bed so you can rest while Rolo figures out where your brother is.” Matthias pulls me into his arms and starts walking. “He’ll work everything out, and then I’ll take care of your brother. You don’t have to worry about anything else.”

But I can’t help but worry. I am going to because Gerard found me, and I don’t know how. I made sure not to live in the limelight, not that I would like that. When I moved to New York City, I for paid everything in cash.

I must have done something wrong.

“You’re okay,” he whispers into my ear. “I’ve got you. Nothing is going to happen.”

Matthias keeps reassuring me like he knows something is going to happen and wants to convince me that. Should I be worried?

“Adalisa?” a voice I recognize shouts out.

My head shoots up, looking in the direction of the door, and my eyes go wide.

“Margery?”

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 1:40 pm

ADALISA

“ I can’t believe you are here,” I whisper as I wrap my arms around her. “I thought you were dead or had disappeared. I looked around the city, trying to figure out where you were.”

“She landed herself in the asylum looking for her.” Matthias shakes his head, and I pull away from Margery, keeping close in case I need to do something to get us away from them.

“Only because I told her about it. I wanted to know whether she was in there or not,” I point out as Ethan looks at me strangely.

“I didn’t know you were seeing Matthias. How long have you been keeping this from me? Is he who you met at the speed dating thing?” Margery asks, grabbing hold of my hand.

“Yes, he is. I didn’t know who he was or how dangerous, but he captured my attention, and I couldn’t get away.” I keep my fib from weeks ago going.

Guilt fills me up as I look at Margery, and she cracks a smile. “You can stop lying,” she chuckles. “I knew you were lying the first time. You going to a speed dating event? You would never.”

I look at her, shocked. “You knew the whole time?”

She nods.

“It wasn’t hard to figure out you were lying, but I knew what you were going to do was something you’ve probably thought about a lot. I knew you would be safe, so I didn’t say too much. But I’m glad you met him.” Margery gives my hand a squeeze.

“More like he stalked and found me.” I roll my eyes as I look at Matthias. “He came to the store several times in disguises.”

I still can’t believe he did that. Did he not think that I wouldn’t go out with him if he asked? I would have said yes in a heartbeat.

“I don’t know Matthias that well, but that tracks,” Margery chuckles.

I fidget in my spot as Ethan continues to look at me. Does he not want me here? That isn’t going to fly with me. I will see Margery whenever I want to, and he can’t keep me away from her.

“I heard you have found some trouble.” Ethan raises an eyebrow.

I nod. “My brother. Should be in prison, but he’s out and in New York.”

“And you want Matthias to take care of him?” Ethan inquires.

I look at Matthias. Do I want him to take care of it? Yes, but at the same time, he is blood related to me. I know what he did was bad, but there is still some small piece that makes me want to work on it and see if we could have a normal relationship. But I know that isn’t likely.

“I will be taking care of everything,” Matthias says before I can answer. “I already have Rolo on it. Once I have a location, I’m going in.”

And part of me is happy he’s going to be kill him. Gerard deserves to die after almost

killing me. If I could do it, I would but I know I wouldn't be able to.

“Good. You guys can move in here if you want,” Ethan offers.

I open my mouth to say something when Matthias wraps his arm around my waist and pulls me close to him.

“We'll think about it,” Matthias replies. “Thank you for the offer.”

“How about we eat?” Margery pipes up. “I'm starving.”

“We just ate and were about to head to bed. Both of us have had a long day,” Matthias once again answers before I can.

I glare at him. “I am perfectly fine. Yes, we did have a an eventful day, but everything is fine. I can stay up and hang out with them.”

Matthias pulls me away from Margery and shakes his head. “No. We are going to go to bed. You need the sleep..”

Margery holds her hand up and stares at me.

“Yes?” I ask.

“Is this the man you were talking about on the phone?” she asks. “The one who comes into your apartment at night, and you know?” She wiggles her eyebrows.

My face heats up as I feel Ethan and Matthias staring at me. I completely forgot about the conversation I had with Margery about that. How I told her I was seeing someone who would come into my apartment and have sex with me. Though it was only once and very hot.

“You talked about me?” Matthias kisses the side of my head. I can hear the smirk in his voice, and I don’t dare look at him.

“Just briefly. I talked about how awful you were in bed and how I didn’t know someone could be that bad.” I look at Margery, trying to keep eye contact with her so I don’t giggle.

“I’ll show you how bad I can be in bed,” Matthias whispers in my ear.

I shiver, arousal flooding me. I can’t wait until he shows me later on.

“Okay, don’t do that in front of me.” Margery fake gags. “I don’t need to see what my best friend is up to. Stop. No. I can’t take it any longer.”

I chuckle and pull away from Matthias. “We aren’t doing anything.”

“Yet.” She points a finger at me. “You guys aren’t doing anything yet. But give it a couple more seconds... I do not want to see that. No matter how much I love you, there are just some things that need to stay private... at least for me.”

I crack a smile at her. “Right back at you. Well, you guys weren’t doing anything, either.”

Margery playfully glares at me. “We like to keep it in the bedroom where no one else can see. Ethan is a little possessive when it comes to me.

“Just a little?” Matthias chuckles. “More like a caveman.”

Ethan glares at Matthias.

“We are going to go to bed. She needs her rest, and we have a full day tomorrow,”

Matthias says before anyone else can say anything.

“But—”

Matthias picks me up and starts walking out of the living room.

“I’ll see you tomorrow!” Margery yells.

I wave right before Matthias turns a corner. “That was mean,” I mumble. “I haven’t seen her in weeks, and I wanted to talk to her. Maybe you could have taken Ethan with you so he would stop glaring at me.”

“He wasn’t glaring at you,” Matthias huffs. “He was just assessing whether you are going to make it in this lifestyle or not.”

I look at Matthias like he’s grown two heads. “Who is he to judge if I can make it or not? I’ll show him,” I grumble.

How dare Ethan assess if I can make it or not when he doesn’t even know me? I can and will live in their world.

“I’m sure you’ll prove him wrong,” Matthias gently assures me. “You like to do that.”

“You bet I do.” I cross my arms when he sets me down on the bed.

Standing up, I walk over to the bathroom and start to get ready for bed quickly so I can relax.

Oh, that sounds so good. Getting under the soft covers, getting warm and comfortable.

I look at my toiletry bag to see the silver bracelet Matthias gave me to show that I was consenting.

Slipping it on, I look in the mirror and stare at myself.

So much has changed since I first met him. A lot has changed since I moved to New York, and not all of it is bad.

When I'm ready, I make my way to the bed and pull my shirt off, leaving my sports bra and shorts on.

I want to sleep naked, but I don't want to do so next to Matthias.

I've done it before, but we had sex before, and it was completely different.

So much stuff has happened since then, and I don't know if I will be comfortable.

"Stop thinking and come into bed." Matthias pats the sheets right next to him.

I crawl into bed, snuggling next to him and placing my head on his chest. I could get used to this. Having his strong arms wrapped around me, holding me close the whole night. It feels like heaven and makes me feel so safe.

"I'm proud of you today." Matthias kisses the top of my head. "You have done so much. You should be proud of yourself as well."

"Why?" I ask.

I freaked out in the grocery store. I felt like I was drowning after I saw my brother. How is that anything to be proud of?

“You ate food you didn’t make or buy,” Matthias points out. “I’m so proud of you for trusting me.”

It dawns on me that I did eat the food Matthias prepared.

“I did do that,” I whisper.

“I know it took a lot to trust me, but I’m so glad you did.” He holds me closer. “I will never take your trust for granted.”

Matthias starts playing with my bracelet, and I’m thankful I can’t see his face right now. Mine is bright red as I stare at my wrist. Am I really doing this?

Yes, I am.

I shouldn’t, with everything that has happened, but I want to. I can’t keep denying the attraction I have. There are a lot of red flags with Matthias, but I can be color blind for him. Some people might call me crazy, but I don’t care. I think I might love him.

I suck in a breath. I love Matthias. I want to spend the rest of my life with him, no matter how crazy life is going to get. I want to do it with him.

I’ve never felt like this with anyone before, and I don’t want to let it go. I don’t want to miss the opportunity and compare everyone to him. No one is going to come close to how he makes me feel.

I trace my finger against his stomach as he continues to play with my bracelet. Is he thinking about the same thing I am? I want to rip off his boxers right now and have my way with him, but I want to be woken up with pleasure. Pleasure I crave from him.

“What are you thinking about?” he asks, pulling me out of my thoughts.

“Us,” I reply honestly.

“What about us?”

Am I ready to give him the truth that I want to stay with him for the rest of my life?
That I’m okay with what he does for a living?

“How good we look together, Daddy.” I look at him.

A smile spreads across his face, and it takes my breath away.

“Do that more often,” I mumble, tracing his face. “I love it when you smile.”

“Only for you.”

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 1:40 pm

MATTHIAS

I look down at Adalisa, taking in her sleeping form, all cuddled up against me.

“Precious,” I whisper, running my hand through her hair. “Absolutely precious.”

Hearing her call me Daddy before she went to sleep was the highlight of my day. I was getting a little worried that she was never going to call me Daddy, but she proved me wrong again.

What did I do to deserve someone like her in my life?

Nothing.

Pushing myself up carefully, I pull back the covers and stop when Adalisa starts murmuring in her sleep, turning to lie on her back.

Her arm moves around the spot I was just in, and I can’t help but smile.

She’s looking for me. Lifting my pillow, I place it under her arm and watch as she pulls it to her chest and falls right back asleep.

“Fucking precious,” I mumble before I look down at her shorts-covered bottom.

Right. The first step is to take those off. I carefully loop my fingers around elasticthem, making sure to also grab her panties. Slowly shimmying it down her legs, I stop several times as she moves, not wanting her to fully wake up yet.

“Good girl,” I praise her, even though I know she isn’t awake. “My good girl.”

I throw her underwear and shorts somewhere on the ground and gently move her legs apart. Groaning, I take her bare pussy in. I want to play with her, get her all worked up and begging for my cock, but one look and I can’t wait.

I need to be in her.

Grabbing some lube from the table next to the bed, I squirt some on my cock, rubbing it up and down. Shit. Lining myself up at her entrance, I slowly push myself in, closing my eyes as I feel her tight cunt around me.

“Fuck,” I whisper.

It doesn’t take me long to fill her. Adalisa’s mouth opens a little, her chest pushed out, but she’s still asleep. Perfect. Grabbing her hips, I slowly pull out before pushing right back in, letting the pleasure course through us both.

Adalisa moans, moving slightly, but I don’t stop. I continue to slowly thrust in and out of her as my thumb moves to her clit.

“Matthias,” she mumbles.

Smiling, I rub my thumb in a circular motion as I fuck her, slowly waking her up as the pleasure takes over. Her eyes flutter open, and she looks at me.

“Matthias,” she moans, her chest arching as she grips the sheets. “Please.”

I pick up the pace, letting pleasure take over. Adalisa clenches around me, making me throw my head back as I let out a growl.

“Shit.” I take a deep breath. “I’m like a fucking teenager.”

“Please, Matthias,” she begs. “Please, Daddy.”

My eyes lock onto hers as I lose control, thrusting into her with more passion, more force.

“Come, Adalisa, come for Daddy,” I grunt, trying to hold myself back.

Her eyes roll back as she clenches around me, letting pleasure take over as she comes undone, I soon follow her. I slow my thrusts before pulling out and lie down right next to her.

“You can wake me up like that more often,” she mumbles, wrapping her arm around my chest.

ADALISA

“Are you sure this is okay?” I ask Margery as we walk around the compound.

My brother is still out there, and he obviously wants to come after me.

Why else would he have been in the middle of a grocery store, staring at me?

He wants to finish what he started all those years ago.

I can feel it in my gut... it might also be indigestion, but I think he is here to finish what he started.

“I do this every single day, and nothing has ever happened. It’s going to be perfectly fine.” Margery waves her hand in the air. “And besides, there are guards watching to make sure everything is okay. We are completely safe.”

But I can’t help but have this feeling in my stomach, telling me everything isn’t going to be okay.

“Why didn’t you ever tell me about your brother? You told me you were an only child.” Margery looks at me.

I sigh. “I wanted to, but I was trying to forget about him. It isn’t easy remembering everything he did to me,” I mumble. “I wanted to, but there would have been a lot of questions, and I wasn’t ready to talk about it.”

“That’s why you never came over to the house for a meal,” she realizes.

I nod. “Exactly. I didn’t want to say I couldn’t eat it because I bet you cook wonderfully. I didn’t want to have to explain, and you look at me like I’m crazy.”

“I would have never.” Margery stops walking to look at me.

I raise an eyebrow. “Are you sure about that?”

She takes several seconds to think about it. If Margery told me she couldn’t eat food she didn’t prepare, I would think she was crazy. I thought she was crazy for thinking she saw Ethan.

“Okay, I would have totally thought you were crazy,” she giggles.

We continue to walk, taking in the fresh air surrounding us. There aren’t many places in New York City that have land around the property, but I’m grateful for this space. We can hear people walking and talking on the other side of the wall, but besides that, it’s peaceful.

“If I could live here, I would,” I tell Margery. “So quiet, yet you can hear the hustle of the city.”

“That’s what I told Ethan when he first showed me this place. This wasn’t where we were supposed to live, but he saw how much I loved it and decided this was ours.” Margery looks around.

We walk in silence for several minutes, just enjoying each other’s company while being outside. Soon, I’m going to have to go back to work and won’t be able to do this as much. Maybe I can convince my boss to get another manager so I can work fewer hours. That is, if Matthias is okay with that.

“I’m so glad you’re safe,” I tell Margery. “I’m sorry I didn’t believe you at the beginning.”

“It’s okay, I didn’t believe myself either. Not until he showed up and took me,” she chuckles. “I wouldn’t have believed myself if I were you, so don’t feel bad at all. I understand completely and don’t blame you for anything.”

I take a deep breath and let it out. I didn’t think I would be able to apologize properly, but I’m glad she is okay.

“Is he the same as you remember him?” I ask. “Everything you talked about with him, seeing him for the first time, I didn’t think that was him.”

“He’s a little different, but he’s the same man I fell in love with.

He’s the same man I love with all my heart,” she replies, clasping her hands together.

“It was rough with how he came back into my life, but I’m glad he did.

I knew I would never be able to find love like I had with him again.

I’m glad I don’t have to settle or be single for the rest of my life.”

“I’m glad. You look really happy.”

To our right, I see a guard looking around the compound, and I feel myself relax a little more. I am safe here. No one can get to me or take me away.

“Want to head back? I’m starving.” Margery pats her stomach.

“When are you not?” I laugh. “But yeah, let’s go back.”

It doesn't take us long to get back to the house. Margery walks toward the kitchen, a smile on her face.

"Nala!" Margery yells.

I rush after Margery only to find my brother in the kitchen. Nala is in his grip with a knife pointing to her neck.

"You don't need to do this," I tell him, terror rushing through me as I stare at them. "Let Nala go, and I'll come with you."

I don't know Nala that well, but she has been nothing but kind to me. She has let me and Matthias cook in her kitchen. She doesn't let anyone else cook in. She has a special place in my heart, and if anything happens to her, I don't know what I'm going to do with myself.

"Ava," he says, keeping hold of Nala. "Or would you like me to call you Adalisa instead?"

I suck in a breath. Out of the corner of my eye, I spot Margery look at me.

"I haven't gone by Ava since you were sent to prison," I tell him. "Ava is dead to me. I'm Adalisa and have been for years."

Even though I was young, I begged for my name to be changed. Was it a hard process to finally convince them? Absolutely, but I needed it. I needed to feel like I was starting over, especially after everything.

"Let Nala go, and I'll come with you. You can do anything to me as long as you let her go and you don't come back here." I take a step closer.

How did he get past all the guards and over the fence? Where are Matthias and Ethan?

“I think I might stay here.” He twirls the knife in the air.

I breathe easier knowing it isn’t as close to Nala’s neck.

“You don’t need to. There is nothing here for you. It’s all cheap and won’t sell for much. I don’t own this house,” I tell him and briefly look at Nala.

Her eyes are on me, and she shakes her head. Does she know that I will do anything to get her away from him, even if it means dying? Nala looks over at Margery, but I don’t follow her gaze. I can’t take my eyes off him for too long, not when he could do anything with the knife.

“Who does it belong to?” he asks.

“Ethan Montgomery,” I honestly say. “He owns this house.”

My brother scoffs and shakes his head. “Liar! You just don’t want me to have the house. You aren’t going to get your wish. I’m taking this house now, and you are going to stay here and do what I say. I’m going to watch the life drain from you slowly as I finish what I started.”

My heart rate speeds up, and my palms are getting sweaty. None of that is going to happen. Matthias is going to find me before Gerard can make me eat anything. I have to believe he will come after me. But he doesn’t even know anything is wrong. I’m in the house like he told me to be.

“It’s true. Ethan is my husband,” Margery speaks up. “If you let us all go right now, nothing will happen to you. You can get away before anything happens.”

My brother places the knife back to Nala's neck, and I leap forward.

"Not another step!" he yells. "You stay right where you are. If any of you move, your friend is dead."

I hold my hands in the air, letting him know I'm not going to do anything. Calm. Everyone needs to be calm.

"Matthias isn't going to be happy when he finds out you're being held captive," Margery says.

"Matthias?" My brother's interest is piqued. "Matthias, as in the one who works for Ethan?"

I nod. "Yes, he's my husband."

Margery's head turns to me, shock written all over her face. Right. I forgot to tell her we are married.

"No, there is no way you are married to the Matthias. There is no way he lives here with Ethan." My brother shakes his head. "You are just trying to distract me so I don't do anything to you."

I shake my head. "I'm really not. Matthias is my husband, and if he finds out you are holding a gun against Nala and threatening me again, he isn't going to be happy."

I don't know where the confidence came from to say that. Maybe it's knowing Matthias is going to take care of everything. He has to. He promised.

"Let me take her place. You can have the knife pointed at my neck, so let Nala go," I try to reason with him.

“Adalisa,” Margery hisses, and I hold my hand up, silencing her.

“Come on, take me instead,” I urge him. “You won’t get any satisfaction in killing her. You want me. She’ll just be a waste. Take me instead.”

My brother eyes me for several seconds, and I take a step forward. He doesn’t say anything, and I take that as a sign to take another.

“You can have me. You can have the knife to my neck until Matthias and Ethan arrive. Or you can have it at my neck and take me away,” I tell him, giving him some options.

I take one more step, getting within reaching range.

Before I can do anything, he lets go of Nala and grabs my arm, yanking me closer to him and jabbing the knife against my neck.

I take a shaky breath in. This is what I wanted.

I wanted Nala out of harm’s way, but I thought Matthias would be here by now.

Save everything before the knife was touching my neck.

“Let her go, and Matthias won’t do anything,” Margery suggests. “We can say it was all a misunderstanding, that you thought it was someone else. We can come up with an excuse he’ll believe. But you need to let her go now.”

“No!” he yells. “Shut the fuck up!”

“Who are you telling to shut the fuck up? It better not be my wife,” Matthias booms.

ADALISA

My body relaxes as I hear his voice. Matthias is going to take care of everything. He's going to make sure all of us come out here alive.

"Who the fuck are you?" my brother spits out. "Don't you dare come closer or she dies."

Ballng my fists, I clench them tightly as the blade touches my neck again. The cold metal makes me shiver. Everything is going to be okay. Matthias and Ethan are going to make sure everything is okay.

Matthias' eyes narrow on the blade, and part of me feels worried for my brother. He has no idea what he has done. He should have believed us when we told him Matthias and Ethan were coming. Now, he isn't going to make it out alive.

"Matthias," he replies. "And let me guess, you're Adalisa's brother?"

My brother's body stiffens behind me. So he has finally realized that Margery and I weren't bluffing.

"Such a shame," Matthias says, taking a step closer. "I was hoping to meet somewhere that I could hear your screams, but no one would come looking for you."

The knife presses into my neck, and I lock eyes with Matthias. What is he doing? Is he trying to get me killed? One wrong move and my brother could kill me within seconds.

“Don’t take another step!” my brother yells.

I wince, but I don’t take my eyes off Matthias. If I am going to die, he’s the last person I want to have my eyes on. Did we get to spend a lot of time with each other when I wasn’t fighting him at every turn? No, but the little time we did was amazing and I wish we could have had more.

“I love you,” I whisper for the first time.

“Adalisa,” Matthias growls.

“Shut up!” my brother screams, the knife digging into my neck.

Warmth liquid flows down my neck slowly, making tears well in my eyes. He’s pushed a knife into my neck. What’s next?

“I don’t want to die,” I barely get out. “I don’t want to die yet. I’m not ready. I’m just starting my life.”

“You aren’t going to die,” Matthias tells me, ignoring my brother.

“She is going to die. She should have died all those years ago. She should have died when I first tried to kill her, but she just didn’t.

She had to go and get the neighbor to take her to the hospital.

She had to get on people’s good side so they would take care of her.

” There is so much hatred in my brother's voice. “Always trying to be so perfect and make sure everyone loved you. That’s why you have to die.”

What did I do to deserve so much hate from Gerard? Growing up, I never thought he hated me, not until he showed his true colors. How naïve am I?

“What did I do?” I whisper, feeling lost. “Why do you hate me so much? Why were you trying to kill me?”

Matthias takes a step away from us, and I look at him, confused. Why is he taking a step away from us? But he doesn’t look at me, he keeps his eyes trained on my brother.

“You were born. You took our parents away from me, and then I was stuck taking care of you,” he sneers. “I wanted to give you to foster care, drop you off at a church, but that would’ve made me look bad. Everyone would have asked why. So I decided to slowly kill you so no one would know.”

Tears pool in my eyes. All I ever wanted was a family who loved me, and hearing Gerard tell me how much he hates me breaks my heart. I knew he tried to kill me before.

He hasn’t changed.

I look at Margery. There is so much I want to say to her, so much I want to do with her still.

We have our whole lives ahead of us. Tears glisten in her eyes as she looks at me.

She knows I don’t have long left I’m dead.

I just hope when I go that she isn’t watching. I don’t want my death to haunt her.

“But you didn’t die, so when I went off to prison, I made sure I was on my best

behavior, helping everyone who needed it and being a role model so I could have the possibility of parole.

When they let me out, I knew I needed to do was kill you.

It was always the end game.” He releases some of the pressure on the knife.

“This time, you aren’t going to live. I won’t allow it. ”

I look over at Matthias, wanting to see him one last time, but I don’t see him anywhere. Ethan stands in his place, a wicked smile across his face as he looks at my brother.

“Think again,” someone whispers, their voice void of any emotion.

I close my eyes as the knife slides across my throat. My hand flies to my neck, holding on as I crumpling to the ground. All I can hear is groaning and rustling, but I don’t pay any attention to it.

“Keep the pressure on it,” Ethan says from my side. “It’s going to be okay.”

Tears fill my eyes as I look at him. I open my mouth, but he shakes his head.

“No, no talking. I want you to keep pressure and remain calm. Brad, the doctor, is coming to check on you. He’ll be here any minute now. I want you to just take nice, easy breaths until then.” His voice is gentle but firm, letting me know I have no room for argument.

I can feel the blood pooling beneath my hand, making my eyes go wide.

“Shh, you’re okay. There is some blood, but not a lot. You’re not dying,” Ethan says,

scooting back a little.

“Adalisa.” Matthias comes into view, blood splattered all over his face, his hands coated in the red coppery-smelling liquid.

He killed Gerard.

“You’re safe,” he whispers. “Everything is okay. Brad is almost here to look you over. He can’t hurt you anymore.”

Tears run down my face, my shoulders sagging with relief. My brother can’t hurt me anymore.

“I know, baby. After Brad looks over you, you can break down, but I need you to be stronger for just a little while. Can you do that for me?” he asks. “Can you be my brave girl for a little while longer?”

Nodding, I keep my eyes on him as we wait for Brad.

“You should be all good to go. You have seven stitches in your neck, so I don’t want you to do anything strenuous for a while.” Brad starts to clean up his mess. “I want to see you in a week to see how it’s looking. Depending on how it’s healing, we may take the stitches out.”

“Thank you for stopping by,” Matthias says and shakes his hand.

“Any time. And if you need anything, call me,” Brad says before he leaves.

Matthias kneels in front of me and cups my face with his hands. “You’re going to be perfectly fine.”

“I know,” I whisper, tears of relief filling my eyes.

“Tell me again.” Matthias runs his thumb across my cheek.

I furrow my eyebrows. “Tell you again?” What is he talking about?

“Tell me you love me again,” he demands.

A smile breaks out across my face.

“I love you,” I whisper.

“Again,” he commands.

“I love you, Matthias.”

He smiles. “Again,” he says gently.

I chuckle and raise an eyebrow. “Are you going to tell me you love me?”

“I love you, Adalisa. I have since the first time I saw you.” He kisses my lips. “Now, tell me again.”

“I love you.”

EPILOGUE

ADALISA

“What do you think about living here?” Matthias asks.

I suck in a breath, my body freezing. Does Matthias want to stay here? How am I going to tell him? Maybe he won’t notice how much I’m struggling.

I look at the house in front of us. After my brother somehow got past the guards, nothing has been the same.

Ethan has been trying to figure out who let him in.

It hasn’t been easy on me. Sleep has been impossible, as has eating.

It’s like I’ve been violated. The space I was getting comfortable in was violated.

“Honestly?” I turn to him.

“Always.” He grabs my hand, giving it a little squeeze.

I take a deep breath, closing my eyes for a second, and I center myself. If I could change things, I would. If I could go back in time, I would. In a heartbeat.

“I loved being here,” I honestly tell him.

“I love being so close to Margery. I loved feeling safe here, but I don’t anymore.

You’ve noticed how I’m sleeping and eating.

I don’t think I’m ever going to feel safe here again, not enough to live normally.

I don’t want to leave, but at the same time, I can’t stay here. ”

“Good thing we aren’t staying here, then,” he says.

My mouth falls open as I stare at him. “We aren’t?”

“No, we aren’t. I saw how you were after I killed your brother. I don’t want you around that. I want you to feel comfortable and safe. I want you living your best life and not having to worry, so I bought us a house.”

“No,” I whisper, not believing him.

“Yes. Well, it was a four-story apartment building, but I figured we could have a level for different things. One could be the bedroom, a massive one with maybe a couple of smaller guest rooms. But it’s ours and we are going to move there.

” He smiles. “Our stuff is already there. I had it moved this morning when we were out.”

“I don’t know what to say,” I whisper.

“Then don’t. You living with me for the rest of your life is enough.”

I lean into his embrace, kissing his lips quickly before snuggling into his chest. I’m sad I won’t be as close to Margery, but I’m excited to get out of here and feel safe again.

“Thank you,” I whisper.

“Thank you .” He kisses my lips again.

We stare at each other for several seconds, letting time and silence pass by without a care in the world.

This is my life now. Was it rocky in the beginning? Absolutely, but it’s so worth it.

“I knew you were going to give in,” his mother yells.

I chuckle and pull away. I haven’t seen her since the first time I met her but apparently I made an impression because she’s asked Matthias about me several times.

After the attack, I didn’t want to see anyone. I just wanted to recover and be with Matthias. That didn’t make many people happy, but Matthias took care of that all.

“Mrs. –”

“Don’t you dare call me that. It’s Mama to you or Mom. I won’t have it any other way. You are family now, and as family, that’s what you call me,” she scolds me.

Chuckling, I open my arms and hug her. “Mom, nice to see you.”

“Keeping me away after you got hurt. I should spank you, but I think Matthias has that handled.” She winks at me, and I look at her, horrified. “Now, come on. Let’s get inside so we can eat.”

“Um.” I look over at Matthias for help.

“Mama, we can’t.” Matthias steps closer to me.

“Nonsense. I won’t have you losing weight. Not if you are going to have my grandchildren at some point. I need to fatten you up.” She pats my shoulder. “Come on. You can even help cook. The groceries just got delivered.”

It’s not that I don’t trust Mom, but I don’t think my body will be able to do it.

“How about I cook and you two can watch,” Matthias offers. “You trust me, right?” I nod. “Who bought the groceries?”

“Bellamy did. I gave him the list. You told me Adalisa likes pasta and chicken. Everything is still in its packages,” she explains.

Matthias cups my face with his hands, pulling me close. “I’ve got you. We’re going to go in there, we are both going to look at the packages, and then I’m going to cook. Then I’m going to feed you bite by bite because you trust me and I’m not going to let anything happen to you.”

I take a deep breath and nod. Matthias and I look into each other's eyes for several more seconds, him grounding me before we go into the house.

“Ready?” Mom breaks the silence.

Matthias lets go of my face and takes my hand. “We’re ready.”

I continue to look at him. “I love you.”

A smile breaks out across his face. “I love you, too.”